





Class PZ3

Book B5233

Copyright N<sup>o</sup> Ba

**COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT**

COPY 2





# **THE BARON OF THE BARRENS**

**WILL J. BLOOMFIELD**



✓

# THE BARON OF THE BARRENS

BY  
WILL J. BLOOMFIELD  
" "



*Publishers*

**DORRANCE**

*Philadelphia*

*Copy 2.*

Copyright 1923  
Dorrance & Company Inc

PZ 3  
B6233  
Ba  
Copy 2



Manufactured in the United States of America

© C1A692675

JAN - 3 '23

R

no 2



Ms. B. 2. 7. 23.

*To*

that stanch friend who perused the chapters of the story as fast as penned and who stoutly encouraged me or urged me on when my spirits were low or interest lagged—*Vance D. Brown, of Reynoldsville, Pennsylvania.*



# CONTENTS

---

I	Shadows of Coming Events .....	11
II	The Hillside-Mooney .....	20
III	The Missing Link .....	33
IV	Jerushy .....	37
V	The Tentacles of the Octopus Begin to Move .....	50
VI	The "Act" at the Arlington Cafe .....	61
VII	Cabin Raising at Hermit Spring .....	71
VIII	Home .....	80
IX	Heather from the Braes .....	86
X	Wherein Jean Practices Elusion .....	93
XI	"How Uncle Fuller Done the Town"....	101
XII	Wherein Cadmus Takes a Peep Into the Future .....	110
XIII	The Ballet of the Birds and Milton .....	123
XIV	The School, the Whistler and the Storm ..	140
XV	Wherein James Makes Two Discoveries ..	153
XVI	In Front of the Goldstein Emporium ....	166
XVII	Three Dreams .....	172
XVIII	Christmas on Nubbin Ridge .....	185
XIX	The Mysterious Card .....	199
XX	The Parting of the Ways .....	201
XXI	Wherein Old Milt Presents a Dual Face..	213
XXII	"Watchful Waiting" .....	226
XXIII	Nancy Dawson .....	236
XXIV	Wherein a Shadow Plays a Conspicuous Part .....	247
XXV	What Nitroglycerin Did for the Wildcat Well .....	255
XXVI	After Five Years .....	268
XXVII	Back to the Barrens .....	274
XXVIII	"And It Shall Come to Pass That at Evening Time It Shall Be Light" ..	278
XXIX	Back to Scotland .....	282
XXX	America .....	290
	Aftermath .....	295



# **THE BARON OF THE BARRENS**



# The Baron of the Barrens

## I

### SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS

To be accurate, geographically, the "Barrens" overspread the entire southern part of Sal King township, in the foothills of the Alleghenies. As the name implied, it lay a vast waste—rocky hills almost nude of timber—a solemn desert, but for animal life, vying with the Sahara. After the passing of the primeval forest, devastating fires swept over it at periods, preventing growth taller than bushes, which in turn succumbed to the inevitable flames. Of the virgin forest, there yet remained an occasional tall dead tree, usually limbless, standing out against the sky, a ghost of the past. To the common observer, this desolate region could be of no use further than to help hold together the world's great mass. But to the naturalist, or the prospector, it might have hinted at latent treasure held within its bosom.

Who possessed this forbidding expanse of landscape? That, even, was vague. Records in the archives at the court-house would show, but no one ever believed it worth research.

The topographical relief north of the Barrens was the Nubbin Ridge country, divided by a deep, narrow valley, dark and damp with hemlock and birches, down through which the placid waters of Hazel Fork flowed singing of the hills until they joined the river far down in the bottom lands.

Nubbin Ridge was a long, broad fold of land, not so lofty as the Barrens, and hillocked over the top. It was a picturesque stretch of country to the eye of the landscape artist, but unprofitable in the practical view of the agricul-

turist. Here were heaps of rocks tumbled together and groves of stunted, gnarled oaks spreading their tops like gigantic umbrellas; in the dells, there were the birches through which meandered sparkling brooks over pebbly ways and amid tall ferns and grasses; here, again, were copses of wild plum bushes and the thorn; in the moist, dark places were clumps of laurel and the rhododendron; here were wild bush honeysuckles that in season of bloom flashed acres of pink blossoms. Wild grape-vines trellised themselves on the low trees, and in autumn blue clusters of the fruit hung festooned from the branches; clambering over some tall dead tree-trunk the woodbine created a pillar of green, to be changed by frost into a tower of red.

This stretch of country was thinly inhabited. Between clearings, there were usually acres of rocky woodland. The people, amid the riot of flowers, the air honeyed with the wild crab-apple, and the song of the brooks in the grassy meadows, should have tingled with poetry; but their thoughts never left the earth. Their crops grew only with constant care, and they tussled with the things in life remote from the romantic. Agriculture on Nubbin Ridge was a reproach to husbandry, and the people, reared on a thin and grudging soil, fitted their environment. They saw things with a hollow eye and a harsh unsympathetic laugh. They never used a joke as a companion to mirth; they viewed it as an instrument of torture. Away to the north, they could look over a fine rolling farm-country—look into Canaan; but entrance they were forbidden. They were a people set apart and a law unto themselves.

One warm afternoon in middle September, old Milt Cobb came home from Petrolia and after shoving the old dog outdoors, appropriated his late seat, an old splint-bottom rocking chair, and settled himself where he could look out the back door. The only view from that point of vantage was the cheerless Barrens across the hollow. Neck outstretched, on this expanse his eyes were riveted, oblivious to the old woman near him. She sat by the table paring peaches, the old brindle cat purring at her feet. She had not given her spouse a look till he was in and settled, the while whetting her tongue for domestic fric-



tion. But when silence grew disturbing, she turned, sat bolt upright and threw her searchlight full upon him. When under the influence of Petrolia brew, he would sit with his head lolled over like an old hawk, but now, with head thrust out the door, he was looking intensely contemplative. He was not drunk; but she guessed the matter. He was the celebrated yarn fabricator of Nubbin Ridge, to her everlasting mortification. They were to attend an apple-paring that night at Henshaws' and he was now pluming his muse to be ready with some legend as customary.

"I s'pose it's to be a million coons 'n' foxes with firebrands to their tails, runnin' across the Barrens tonight, with the Hillside-Mooney close after them, the whole country lit up for fifty miles aroun', or some sich a mess ye're bound to tell at Henshaws'," she snarled—the sound as cold as iced water.

He turned his face to meet her, a broad face full of humor, fringed with white beard, but now wearing the look of being caught up into the seventh heaven. He cleared his throat, then in a voice that boomed out like a signal gun, began: "Ibby, I've the fetchin'est piece o' news fer ye, beatin' even the time when our tenth child was born. 'Tain't that I fergot to git the cloth fer yer gingham skirt today. But"—he paused as her eyes cut at him like the swing of a sharp scythe—her face the whole keyboard of sharps—eyes, hawk-bill nose, cheekbones, and chin. Yet she was too full for utterance.

He took advantage of it and boomed on: "But tomorrer, I'm goin' back to town an' git it jest as sure 's my name's Milt Cobb. But the news, the *news*, Ibby, the real news is about the Barrens. The worthless Barrens! Drillin' is to soon start on them fer oil. 'N' th' news of it so upsot my cal'lations today that I fergot—"

She started to cut in but he raised a hand to parry the impending thrust and proceeded: "If they find oil over there, w'y we're so near, likely we'll have it. Then ye won't want to wear gingham, anyway. Ye'll want to gown up like the Queen o' Sheby. Stop, Mis' Cobb, right where ye are till I tell ye. Ye know ol' John Snowdon, the oil

king o' Petrolia. Quit now 'n' git yer chair over here to the door while I tell ye."

"Likely to be some lie agin bigger 'n' a haystack," she flung.

"After I'd sold my eggs, today," he continued, unmindful of the caustic touch, "I wound up ol' Nance to a telephone pole 'n' started as innocent as ye please"—here the muscles of her face gave a discrediting twitch—"fer the New York Bazaar to git that gingham, to all intents and purposes, when I meets ol' Snowdon ridin' up in his pleasure car. He motions to me, 'n' has his shoffer stop the car 'n' I goes up to him 'n' he shakes han's lovin'ly an' saiz: 'Milt, yer jest the man I want ter see. Git into the car,' saiz 'e. 'N' I 'lowed I didn't care to take a joy ride in my bizness suit 'n' he laughs 'n' figgered we didn't meet ev'ry day 'n' to git in. 'N' I didn't think so much o' ridin' with him fer ye know I'm the bell sheep here on the Ridge in matters o' pollyticks; 'n' them town fellers allus keep an' eye on me jest afore 'lection fer they know as I swing, so swings the Ridge. My name's allus in the paper 'bout that time—"

"Yes, 'n' I cut out the last mention of ye last winter 'n' pasted it in my scrap-book," interrupted Aunt Ibbey in a revengeful way. "Thought comin' generations might like to read about their ancestor."

"'Member how it read, Ibbey?" he ventured after a brief pause. For there had been mention of him not particularly savory at times in the paper.

"Remember it? Yes. It read: 'Jest as we go to press, old Milt Cobb of Nubbin Ridge come in with a rabbit. He is a wonderfully well-pickled old man. He has lived to decorate with lilacs the graves of those who have perished in three wars. He has seen his own promissory notes rise, flourish, and decay.' Them's the very words."

Milton looked sober. He was uncertain whether the notice was a reflection or otherwise; whether it was cast at social position or political standing. If the former, he would treat it as piffle. Soon he arrived at the conclusion that his political eminence was unassailed, however, in the article, and proceeded: "Wal, I saiz, I can't ride with

ye, today Ye see I'm bizzy pickin' out my deeply beloved pard'ner a gingham shirt—"

"Merciful heavens!!!" she yelled, dropping her paring knife and peach.

—"skirt, I saiz, an' it's goin' to take time an' an awful cool head."

Here Aunt Ibbey effectually stopped him. Weary of the preliminary jargon, she demanded the name of the newcomer of the Barrens and if there was any assurance of an oil development, or if it was just some of his moonshine again? From his haggling way of talking, she got a hazy idea that a certain James Snowdon, Jr., was the possessor of the Barrens and purposed to test the territory for oil; that he was a nephew of the grand mogul, John Snowdon, of Petrolia, and that between the pair, there existed estrangement. The elder Snowdon attached some claim to the territory, not patent to Cobb, but was anxious for the young man to prospect unmolested, though he wished quick and first-hand information as to results. He desired Cobb, secretly, to secure him samples of oil sands, if any were found, and for the clandestine work, had promised attractive compensation.

When this much of the story had been unfolded, the old people lapsed into silence, both busy with their thoughts. Slowly the old woman's face began to light up, and golden visions of days free of toil softened her toward her wayward partner. What news!

"Dear me! I wonder how 'twould feel to be rich," she sighed, folding her tired hands in her lap and allowing herself to play with vanity.

"Oh, I'd first have to git a cooper to hoop ye to keep ye from bustin'," chuckled the old man, glad to know her ruffled feelings were mollified and that peace would reign over the cabin for some time to come.

Yes, vanity had pricked her already. "There's one thing we'd want to do in pertickler, Pa, if they start drillin': have our pickters took before strikin' oil, then d'rectly after."

"We'd want to go to a beauty doctor first 'n' have our faces overhauled to fit the camery," he pestered.

She rose and went to the door unmindful of the jest. In that direction, for half a century, she had watched the sun go down on the Barrens with a feeling of loneliness. Now it had suddenly changed into a land of promise. As she shaded her eyes with a hand and gazed over the waste, the scenery presented a new and strange appearance. It was a summer's afternoon. Nature had been decking her autumnal costume with varied hues, as if testing colors ere she donned the whole resplendent robe. Scattered maples lent tints of yellow and crimson, while clusters of sumac flashed scarlet. Thickets of wild plum bushes vied with oaks in touches of sombre red. The vastness of it all, this great mantle spreading away to the horizon where the hill-tops met the sky in waves of blue, inspired within her a feeling of reverence.

Back of her, on a shelf, the old clock buzzed out five, breaking the golden dream. Her mind reverted to the promoter of the enterprise. "Where is the young man? Does he live in Petrolia?" she asked, turning to the old man.

"No," he replied, raking a match on the bare floor to light his pipe. "He's supposed to be on the road somewhere now 'tween here 'n' Oklahomy. He's been out in that oil field for some time."

She sat down. "Looks like his uncle is going to play the cat 'n' mouse game with him, don't it?" Then she added reflectively, "Ye don't intend to meddle in their affairs?"

"I dunno,"—seriously.

Her brow darkened. She straightened up and regarded him with an eye of contempt. "Ye don't know? Ye better not go to pokin' yer nose in what's none of yer affairs. If I can't have an honest livin', I don't want any."

He was silent on that point as he blew smoke upwards and watched it curl with half-shut eye.

"Ain't the ol' rascal 'fraid ye'll tell what he's up to?" she questioned.

"No."

"Nor me?"

"He knows we won't blab this."

"Like to see him or any other man make me hold my

tongue when it comes to fixin' up jobs like ye two seem bent on," she challenged.

"Ye'll hold it all right when I tell ye he's bought the mortgage that hangs over yer head an'll foreclose it first time he hears any leaks from here."

Down came her air castle of a moment ago, the highest one she had ever built, clattering about her ears. A life-time of work and scrimping had failed to pay the purchase price of their home, for there had been many children, and returns from the soil had been small. Though the children were gone from the home most of the debt still clung. Little more than the interest had ever been paid; but the mortgage had been in lenient hands till John Snowdon, the reputed Shylock of the country, had now swooped down on them unexpectedly with it. A dark shadow loomed. But if the old man could be brought to do shadowy things, the sky might clear. They were trapped, artfully trapped. No, she would never consent to have him practice knavery on young Snowdon, whoever or whatever he might be, to save her home. And they would be ousted at last. She gazed despairingly around her. In this little old cabin stuck up on the sheltered side of a hill, all the days of her married life had come and gone. Her children, the pride of her heart, had all been born here, and memories clung around the spot. Her children were ne'er-do-wells; little help could be expected from that quarter. She would only add to their burden when the time came for her to leave her quiet retreat and be cast upon their mercy. Her face was now, indeed, a picture of misery as she turned to old Milt who was yet blowing smoke. "Is there no way to save us? I'll never hear to yer bein' a snake in the grass to this young man what's comin'?"

"Now see here, Ibbey, don't ye see that sun over there that's never failed us?" he asked courageously, pointing to the golden ball slowly sinking.

"Yes, but it's goin' down, Milt,"—disconsolately.

"To rise agin as fair as ever it shone before."

"Not to us, Milt."

"Don't be alarmed, ol' woman. I'm goin' to match wits

with old John Snowdon. I'll beat the devil with his own pitch-fork, yit, 'n' that's the only way to fight him. Yes, wait for a tomorrer. Old John won't foreclose right away and we'll see what the young man is like. They hate each other like torment; and I'm jest waitin' and anxious to meet this young feller an' mebbly things'll take a happy turn when he gits 'round. Somethin' says it will. The earth may whirl off 'n' its ax afore old John shoots his pizen. He fears me. He said he'd hearn I'se slippery as an eel an' hell fer lawin', but to look out. He would stan' no nonsense, but if I brought him the truth, he'd clear the mortgage."

"I'm afeerd, Milt."

"Ye git warm biscuits 'n' honey for supper an' I'll take care o' the Snowdon kit," he said, starting to build a fire in the old stove. He endeavored to sing as the old woman moved with heaviness of heart to prepare their meal. The burden of his song was a dissertation on the situation of the present,—

"Old John Snowdon was a settin' out to rob,  
His own blood relation, usin' Uncle Milt Cobb;  
While Iby was a grievin' why old Milt could sing,  
Trustin' in a measure what another day might bring."

Just at this period of the nasal minstrelsy, a loud rap sounded on the front door, accompanied by a young man's full-lunged rippling laugh. The old people were somewhat set back—she standing with a rolling pin in hand, he with the stove-griddle lifter completing the picture of domestic drama.

The old dog now went barking around the house and they heard some one say, "The Nubian lion is let loose." The knock was repeated while the voice began to coax the dog. Then a second voice joined in.

The old man stared at Aunt Iby. "D'ye s'pose they ketched what I'se a singin'?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

"No more'n they could understand the bellerin' of a bull," she returned.

The door sagged and dragged and was never used save

on state occasions. But the old man began pulling at the stubborn portal, while the dog renewed his howls of dissatisfaction over the visitors. The musical voice again sought to pacify him. The old man yanked more stoutly and the door began to yield.

“I’ll have ’er open in a minute, boys. Don’t mind the dog. The old varmint, like his master, hain’t nary a tooth in his jaws.”

## II

### THE HILLSIDE-MOONEY

The door was obdurate. It had yielded several times by inches but now it was hanging tenaciously and old Milt's tugging and wrenching no longer made the slightest impression.

"Boys, guess ye'll have to use the back door to the king's castle," he boomed, baffled.

"If you desire, I'll put my shoulder to it, Uncle," came one of the voices from outside.

"Crash 'er in."

No sooner was the order given than the door yielded with such swiftness from a force seemingly sufficient to have moved the house from its foundation that it sent old Milt flying backward upon the floor. Then followed the stranger, looking surprised, troubled, as he lifted old Milt up.

"Have I hurt you?" he asked solicitously when he had the old man upright once more.

Old Milt stood looking dazed. He had been down and up so quickly that nerve action had not communicated as yet the effect of the sudden drop and rise. He was cogitating whether he had ever before made a round trip between two given points with such velocity. Uppermost in his mind was motion; no thought yet of pain. He was steadfastly regarding the place where the phenomenon had transpired. He viewed the door—the machinery used in the first part of the trip. That seemed unimpaired, intact.

"Are you hurt, Mr. Cobb?" came the question again, more seriously.

He looked up. "N-o-o; but I'm jest a wonderin' what kind of a gyration that was I've jest passed through,"—said with such drollery that back went the stranger's head in a fit of laughter.



When he regained composure, he extended his hand saying: "My name is Snowdon; Jim Snowdon, or the Baron of the Barrens. Yes, owner of the Barrens. Going to test that barren country for oil. Consequently will be a neighbor of yours for a time. Step in, Cad. Mr. Cobb, this is my friend and co-worker, Mr. Allen."

"'Tis, hey." But Milt did not shift his eyes from Snowdon. The man's appearance was striking. Had Milt's lore ever reached the Scandinavian chapter, he would have pronounced him a Viking in form, but as it was he mentally said: "Tall and straight as a Huron." Snowdon's face was bronzed from a southern sun, the forehead white under the broad-rimmed hat. The merry twinkling eyes were of that peculiar blue in which innocence merges with mischief. The features were regular, but for the jaw which was slightly accentuated, denoting firmness. As he removed his hat, a wealth of shining chestnut-brown hair came into view. His manner had the grace of a knight; but Milt's mind embraced not his elegance. His survey took in only the muscular man, the Herculean frame, the strength attendant. Wonderingly, he exclaimed: "Swan! I thought the hut was goin' when you took that reef on it! Ye any relation o' that feller that upset the meetin' house back there in old times?"

"Possibly. Samson or Goliath," laughed the powerful James. "Difficult to trace lineage from Yankeeland back to that meeting house buster, though. But we are looking for a lodging place till we get moved in. Can you keep us over night at least?"

"How does that strike ye, Ma?" inquired Milt, turning to his worthy consort.

"Guess we kin," was the muffled and indifferent reply, though it was the thing she most sought at the time.

Both men stepped outside again then re-entered with suit-cases.

"This way, gentlemen," said the spirited host, proudly, as he led them into a small, cluttered room of which the chief appointments were an ancient four-poster bed and miscellaneous wall hangings, antique and grotesque. James

espied an "*At Rest*" plate hanging over the head of the bed.

"This house wasn't built fer much comfort; jest built in a pinch for *tew* pinch, I guess," said the host apologetically as he descried Snowdon's hair brushing the ceiling and Allen with a mischievous look trying the space between bed and wall.

"Just fits us," said Snowdon, hanging his hat on a nail.

"Place yer sarpy-kacks over in there at the foot o' the bed," continued the old man laboring to wedge them in. "Goin' to drill for oil, hey?"

"Yup. You people up this way will be wearing diamonds once she gets to spouting," promised James.

"Haw! haw! haw! Rings in our noses 'n' ears, I s'pose. Ol' Fin Henshaw 'll look like a Feejee Islander with big round hoops in them pie-plant ears o' his'n. What did ye say this other chap's name was?" turning to Allen.

"Allen; Cad Allen," Allen nonchalantly answered, at the same time touching the strings of an old bass viol that hung on the wall. It emitted a rillet of sound, dolefully deep.

"Say, gents, she's been an old rip snorter in her time," said the old man with glowing pride. "This evenin,' likely's not, I'll set her to talkin'."

"Do," urged Snowdon, seating himself on the bed. "But, say, Uncle, we'd like to separate from some of this soft coal smut."

"Out to the trough by the spring. Come on, boys. Say, ye fellers, I see, is as common as the pigs. I know we'll have a rip stavin' good old time while yer 'mong us." And Milt danced along ahead, out the back door, along a path that led by a row of frost-peach trees loaded with fruit, then up to a steep bank. From beneath a great gray rock, there gushed a fountain of bright water which might have been the haunt of naiads when the world was new. Down a small log spout from the spring, glided a cold, silvery stream that leaped into a great log trough below.

"Oh man, I'd cross a continent for this bird bath!" exclaimed the begrimed James as he dipped great handfuls

of the cooling water, blowing and spluttering when it splashed his face.

Greatly revived they threw themselves down on the fresh grass that grew thickly around the spring to bask in the last rays of the sun, now dropping behind the distant hills. Extremely warm it was for September. They had traveled far and were greatly fatigued. At Petrolia, seven miles away, they had left the cars, planning to make the rest of the journey by automobile; but when they arrived at the beginning of the Nubbin Ridge country just after the road left the main artery of travel, the driver refused to continue the "excursion," as he termed it. The road had become guttered and tortuous. No amount of persuasion, no hire could induce him to climb higher.

"Why, boys, nothing but a flying machine can get you up in there where them catamounts live," he had said. "Deduct from the bill to suit yourselves. How much will satisfy me? O, split it—make it two. You can walk it now O. K. Hide your baggage and get some o' them sure-footed hillsmen to tote it up. Do it for a nickel. Can't be over a mile now up to old Milt Cobb's shack. There's where you'd better camp. Guess he's a little the best o' them but the whole pack ain't much to brag on. Hope to meet you again if you ever emerge into the clearin'. So long!"—and he was off.

They had hidden such of their paraphernalia as they were unable to carry in a thicket by the roadside, and the place of concealment, James now described to Uncle Milt, who promised to bring everything up on his horse that evening. James then felt free to survey the Barrens. Waving his hand in the direction of the rocky hills he rhetorically declaimed: "Five thousand acres of that paradise—the world's offal. Yet under it lies strata that may make a Rothschild of me yet."

"Did ye ever behold it afore?" inquired old Milt with a foxy grin as he squatted on the grass beside them and hugged his knees with his arms.

"Yes; five years ago I explored a portion of it—enough at the time to make me soul sick."

"I sho'd a thought it 'ud a give ye spinal-men-git-us

instid o' soul trouble, if ye tramped it. Funny to me why ye ever bought it."

"Didn't."

"Passed down to ye from Father Adam, eh?"

"My father."

"Owed ye a deep grudge?"

"He never saw it."

"Wal, be ye kith or kin o' the Petrolia Snowdons?"

"John Snowdon of Petrolia is my uncle."

"Did he ever own the Barrens?"

Quick glances were exchanged at this question. James held his own gaze steady but Milt's was quickly averted. Penetration, Jim felt, was Milt's gift. James had come to a period. When he stood at the door rapping, he had caught this much of Milt's improvised song: "John Snowdon—to rob," and this only, for just here he had been seized with a fit of uncontrollable laughter at the ridiculous rhapsody and so failed to catch more. But it was enough to put him on his guard. How much did old Milt know of his business and for whose benefit would it be accounted? The cryptic look he threw at the old man thwarted a positive understanding. To Milt it could mean nothing but "do not meddle." He demurred at further inquiry in that line but his curiosity unsatisfied, veered and came on again.

"When I first come into this country, 'n' that was so long ago these hills round here was little holes in the ground, that tract was owned by a Newark oil company. They sold the timber but the land"—here he paused as if expecting Snowdon to step into the opening and clear the chain of titles; but his quarry remained reticent, sufficient evidence, that he did not care to be interviewed further. "Wal, I hope ye git the juice anyway," Milt finally concluded.

"Wonder if the territory was ever tested for oil?" ventured Allen as he rolled over and propped his head on his hands.

"Might a been—God only knows," and Milt also turned his head, creating the impression that he likewise had arrived at a place of no tell-tales, thank you, Mr. Allen.

The answer, clearly affirmation, caused Allen's eyes to dilate.

"What you goin' to do with your Garden of Eden over there if you don't strike oil, Jim?" Cad asked.

"Still my star will be in the ascendant. Convert it into a bloomin' sheep ranch—you a shepherd in kilts with a crook to fare forth with the collies and foster the flocks," was the response, so quick as to have been a studied conclusion.

Allen snorted. "So that's why you sometimes allude to yourself as the 'Baron of the Barrens' is it?" . . .

"If ye don't find oil, goin' into sheep, hey? They's big money in sheep these times 'n' them hills was built fer sheep-paster if you'd keep the sheep shod. But I feel it in my jints yer goin' to find oil. In these hills, they's oil. I know it," emphatically averred Milt.

"There should be something in them; nothing on top. Is there a level spot on the whole thing large enough to rest on without danger of rolling off?" derisively inquired Allen.

"N-n-n-yes. See that blue-lookin' hill that humps up over there beyond this first great stone heap?" said old Milt pointing. "The top o' that ornament runs back in a long ridge. 'N' there lays at least five hundred acres of as fine, level ground as ever lay out door. But to git to it, *laurel hill!* ye'd want a balloon. They's kind of an old road winds up there on the other side of it; comes up from the Comfort and Petrolia pike; 'bout four mile up there from Comfort. Jest at the edge o' that level ground in one place at the very top o' the hill, is a spring o' water that's a world curiosity; comes out from under a monster rock bigger'n any meetin'-house. They hain't anuther rock anywhere near it. The bottom o' the spring is level rock. It's a sight. It's called Hermit Spring. An old feller by the name o' Trotter used to live in there by it alone an' that give it the name. He hunted 'n' fished, picked berries 'n' sold a salve that he made, for a livin'. Speakin' o' that salve, it was a puller all right; draw hair out on a mud-turtle's shell overnight. But he got old 'n' died there. He was queer in his ways. When you see the way he fixed

up 'round that spring, you'll say it's the home o' the fairies: walks, rustic seats, trees trimmed to grow in queer shapes, bowers o' flowers 'n' grasses 'n' ferns—little channels o' water runnin' among 'em; then a little pond to look like a lake with a little green island in it. Kept fish in that. Folks used to go 'n' camp there—'specially berry pickers—till the big scare come on, ahem!"

"Some animal?" interrogated Allen.

The question was what old Milt craved. He was hoping for it and forthwith launched his legend, all sails to the breeze. "Hillside-Mooney," he responded.

"Hillside-Mooney!" repeated Allen. "What, in the name of all the fabulous gods of Greece, is that?"

"W'y it's suthin' that looks like a man 'n' it tain't, runnin' wild in the hills here. Terrible strange, fierce-lookin' critter!" he promptly explained.

The two strangers exchanged winks.

"Well, how does he look when at his best?" questioned Jim.

"Why, he's got one short leg so he runs around the hill sides 'stid o' goin' up 'n' down. Can't run fast any other d'rection. But around a hill, I'll bet he'd pass a deer. His hair 'n' his whiskers 'n' his eyeballs are redder 'n' any blaze o' fire—so red it sets the woods afire take it in a dry time. That's what keeps the Barrens burnt over so much."

"Why not get that short leg drawn down or get him a shoe with a bottom extension that will even up his legs and afford him the pleasure of up and down hikes? Scientific surgery is focused to such a fine point these days, no doubt the short leg could be stretched to even up with the long one," recommended Allen with affected compassion.

The old man was beginning to squirm. They had not caught the flavor of his mythology with the relish he anticipated.

"Jest ye wait, my Christian friend," he warned, shooting fair at Allen. "If ever yer ketched out on the Barrens alone some night ye'll think ye've seen the devil, that's what ye'll think. Jest as cute young larks as ye be hev lost their nerve 'n' reason at the sight."

"A great mystery," averred Allen, affecting belief for he perceived the old man was nettled. "And a mystery is a success until it is solved. Mr. Snowdon, what do you propose to do with Mr. Hillside-Mooney for wearing fiery whiskers, setting the woods afire and devastating your rich estate?"

"I think I'll procure a warrant for the fleet-footed gentleman and have the sheriff hunt him down. Mr. Cobb, here, naturally becomes the star witness in the prosecution at the"—a blast from a horn on the opposite hillside now cut the still evening air and sent echoes flying over the Barrens, and up and down the rocky defiles.

The three looked at each other, Milt exultant.

"There! there! There's yer tenant now over there on that hillside blowin' his horn!" he vociferated. "Does that from some hillside ev'ry time before some strange thing happens, like a fire or a death. Hearin's believin' hain't it? Don't see how ye k'n hang out a pair o' doubtin' Thomases any longer."

He looked triumphant; his story was now authenticated.

Jim began whistling a low refrain while Cad blurted: "Well, I'll be——. Say, Snowdon, we're bound to get some thrills here if we never strike grease. This excels all the weird tales I ever read or heard of the Irish banshee."

"The clarion of the Hillside-Mooney sounding his premonition is the poem of the hills. The most beautiful word setting for it could be but vulgar. Next we will witness a flame of fire or a pyre in the sky," announced James dramatically, in the stage voice of a Hamlet.

"'Tain't goin' to be fire this time. Woods too damp. Goin' to be a great oil excitement 'round here, I'll bet my house 'n' land. His toot sounded different 'n ever before; kind o' joyful like on the last end, I noticed," maintained old Milt, still clinging to his uncanny theme. But he saw his audience indulging in too frequent glances again.

Cad sometimes spoke with positive sentiment and dignity, then again in terse and emphatic slang. Now very soberly he inquired: "Is your abbreviated-limbed, nimble-

footed, hill-encircling, living hi-hoop-us a man-eating monstrosity in his habits that he so terrifies? Or only a swift, fiery fury, running 'on high,' liable to dash into you, sparks a flying, if you chance in his path?"

Milt scratched his head and swallowed hard. At times he thought the lad serious; again, he felt the sting of satire. Snowdon was even deeper both ways, but slower. They were vacillating converts. This time Allen seemed fondling his primitive ideas of the supernatural. A thriller was in order and the old man braced himself to put on a scene that would send the red rushing from their hearts and play the cold shivers up and down their spinal columns. He rasped his throat and began:

"Wal, sir, I will narrate unto ye a strange 'n' awful hap'nin' that's jest as true as that sun is truly droppin' behind them hills. It happened in huckleberry time on the Barrens. The hillsides was jest blue at the time with berries. Folks come from far 'n' near to pick. A crowd had come that day from Blue Ruin (that's over down on the other end o' the Ridge at the corners). Lodosky Jones 'n' Mary Ann Fish got strayed from the crowd 'n' was higher up the hill than the rest, pickin' 'n' gossipin', Lodosky consid'able higher up than Mary Ann. Wal, it seems from what anuther womern down below heard 'em callin' back 'n' forth, Lodosky was peelin' some one 'bout their cookin' when all of a sudden went the Hillside-Mooney crashin' through the bushes atween 'em, sparks a flyin'. 'She fries 'em in lard!' was Lodosky's words jest then, high 'n' shrill, and her last. She fell in her tracks at the sight. They found her dead right there 'n' Mary Ann as good as—never's knowed anybody sense."

The tale here was broken by the rattle of a cow-bell. It hung on a strap outside the cabin door and its clatter always served meal notices at *hotel de Cobb* when the proprietor was outside.

"Come on, boys,, we'll go 'n' see what the neighbors have fetched in," hastily said old Milt, rising as if welcoming relief for, during the tragic recital, Allen had snickered more than once and Snowdon had peered through very narrow eye-slits.



Aunt Ibbey's board was immaculate in its simplicity. From her chest of precious treasure she had brought forth the sacred blue tea service, exhibited only on rare occasions, and on the white cloth the effect was artistic—accidentally. The cup figure showed a Chinese Mandarin, seated in a fantastic bower of preternatural flowers and birds, and a tilting servant pouring tea. Milt took his place at the head of the table and designated places right and left to the pair—his bowers. Aunt Ibbey, mum and stoic, marched the floor and served, trailed by that stately, brindle grimalkin, Stephen, his catship giving a yowl of want at every turn of her military movements. But she spurned his state of gnawing emptiness. His time for refillment was not yet ripe.

Warm biscuit and wild honey were leaders in the menu. Only too swiftly the biscuits melted away, as Milton kept asking in megaphone voice if they could "mow" away any more. Then, when first appetite had slightly abated he found time to look Jim over again—a compelling figure of a man—and "s'posed" he would employ a driller of course.

"Now, I don't want to enter into yer cal'lations, but there's Riley Henshaw livin' on up the road," he said. "He's been in the oil fields 'n' them what knows it say he k'n punch more hole into the earth in a day than any other man livin'."

"I am the driller," replied Jim, calmly. "Cad and I can perform all the labor on the first venture, after the outfit is moved in and placed."

"What, ye work!" exclaimed old Milt looking him over anew. "Yer kind don't often toil. Didn't s'pose a Snowdon ever done anything but figger int'rest."

Ignoring the imputation, James knit his brows in thought and inquired where lumber might be procured and if there was likelihood of finding any suitable rig timber on the Barrens. He finally decided upon the old man's recommendation to try at Henshaws' in the morning for the additional help he would need at the outset.

Supper over and "Starbucket" milked, Milt hitched old Nance to the prehistoric chariot and jogged off down the hill for the baggage. Mrs. Cobb, after the dishes were

done and tidiness restored, proceeded to the hencoop and settled accounts with a young rooster designed for a morning fry. The "Si'mese Twins," or "Swells," as Milt christened them when speaking aside to Aunt Ibby, for their part, had sauntered to the hillside above the spring where, seated on the ground, they were enjoying a mollifying after-meal smoke and laying plans for the future. Around them the old orchard burdened with fruit spread a mellow perfume. The landscape of the hills was now fading into darkness and stars were breaking through. Occasionally came the sleepy twitter of a restless bird. Below them brooks drowsily rippled down their ways, while from far off drifted the tinkle of bells, the bleating of flocks, voices and the baying of the faithful farm-dog. The atmosphere at that altitude of the Pennsylvania hills soothes as the "balm of Gilead." They were superlatively happy.

When they were retiring for the night, they heard the lord of the manor driving into the barnyard, vocalizing lustily in a sorrowful, sonorous voice, the burden of whose lay was:

“‘O, when I was single, O, then, O, then,  
O, when I was single, O, then;  
O, when I was single,  
I made money jingle,  
And the world it went well with me then.’”

From the next room came mumbled a vituperous epithet regarding an aged liar. In their small "clutter-box," as Cad termed their cramped apartment with its crowded fittings, the window was raised and in a cooling breeze they dropped off to sleep to the croaking lullaby of the cricket orchestra outside. James was soon lost to everything in the wonder of a beautiful maiden clad in ermine vesture who stood with bowed head in the nave of a cathedral, listening to the chant of the angelus—when he awoke with a start. His first effort was an endeavor to recall where he was. Then, as his mind slowly cleared, he felt Cad's deep breathing beside him. A sharp tapping

on the window next arrested his attention—the cause of his sudden waking. Shades of the inferno! Two great fiery eyes, a nose and a wide crescent mouth in a diabolical fiery grin, at that black hour of night! At first glimpse, Jim, now thoroughly awake, quailed. Quickly, however, nerve and wits returned, and he lay perfectly quiet, watching the behavior of the dreadful visitor. The tapping was repeated. The head kept swaying right and left. Beside the bed, standing half open, was his suitcase and in it reposed his “trusty” capable of seven “barks.” Slowly and noiselessly his hand reached out, then down, until he felt the cold steel. It took him several minutes to gain a position where he could hold the weapon to insure a hit without creating an alarm. At length he was able to hold the revolver with his right hand, and with his left steadying the barrel and his face pressing the breech to get the best possible bead near the eyes, he pulled the trigger. A deafening report, a fall outside, a blood curdling shriek from Allen and a silence that was appalling!

“In the name of God, what is it? Where are you, Jim?” cried the terrified lad, now sitting up and throwing his arms around Snowdon.

“Don’t be frightened, Buddie. Guess I got the Hillside-Mooney,” calmly answered Jim, scrambling out of bed and fumbling in a pocket for matches. “He was making an unseasonable call at the window and I gave him our greetings warmly; that’s all.” ..

He stealthily made his way to the window and listened. All was silent. Cautiously he poked his head outside, revolver in hand, ready. No sound. With his free hand he raked a match on the wall; its light revealed nothing. He lit another and looked down. A bursted pumpkin lay on the ground! Too provoked to laugh, he hastily withdrew his head and abandoning caution noisily replaced his gun while Cad whispered, “See anything?”

“Yes, I shot a pumpkin—a Jack-o’-lantern all——”

“——to hell!” finished the jubilant Cad in a sudden burst of relief, his nerves and muscles relaxing by yards it seemed. Then he laughed until a “stitch” caught him in the side.

Finally sobering, Cad asked: "Who do you suppose it was and what was the idea?"

"It's very evident old Cobb is the Hillside-Mooney in various guises with pre-arranged sounds. The purpose as yet is vague."

"Oh, what if you hit him!" cried Allen seized with fresh terrors.

"Only split the pumpkin he had sitting on his head. He was paid for if I had punctured him"—unconcernedly.

And they fell asleep thinking of morning greetings with their host *alias* Hillside-Mooney!

### III

#### THE MISSING LINK

James was wakened by a sound that reversed the magnetic currents and made the hair pull. Craunch, craunch, craunch—outside the window; something ponderous filling its maw! Up he sat, then crawled down over the foot of the bed to reconnoiter. Mists from the streams in the lowlands had rolled up over the hills creating a thick veil so dense as to be almost opaque. Out of the foggy density came the outline of a cow, paunchy, one horn defunct, the other, long and slim, striking back over the head like those of the ibex. She was foraging on the night's folly.

Cad opened heavy eyes and began to stir. "Anything unusual with the morning, Mr. Snowdon?" he inquired.

"Cunning old man!" exclaimed Jim, crawling back into bed, and smiling at Milton's cleverness. "The magician has his old cow out early removing fragmentary traces of the black art that he fell down on during the night. Hopes that we haven't discovered the wizard's decapitated poll yet."

Cad grew thoughtful. "The old coon seems steeped in hocus-pocus. Tryin' to scare us out, don't you think?"

"He's obsessed with a mania of some kind—necromancy, I guess," answered Jim. "We must be charitable; it's his religion. He's of that peculiar type who invent falsity until after repetition it becomes belief with them. Well, when we go out, show no signs of last night's witchery if you can avoid it. What kind of an actor are you, Cadmus?"

"Oh, I'm a regular Warfield. When you goin' to sally forth?"

"Hav'n't heard the misses rattling at the stove yet. Believe she is innocent of the old man's escapades. Peppery old soul, but an excellent cook and that covers a mul-

titude of sins. We better try for board here till we get our cabin up. Guess I can keep the old man shot down."

When a light rap on the door finally suggested it was time to rise and buckle on armor for the day they rose gaily in a joyous world. There was the yellow sunshine outside, sparkling dew-jewels on the grass, a rooster crowing on a fence-post in satisfaction at fair weather, the spring brook liltng on its way. Their eyes met in a last encouragement before they opened the door and stepped buoyantly upon the stage. However strongly convinced of their ability for characterization they may have been before their advent, they were doomed to be totally eclipsed by the other members of the all-star cast awaiting them.

"Good mornin'. You wash your faces there on that bench or go to the spring where you did last night," commanded Mrs. Cobb as she looked up from the griddle cakes she was flopping and pointed to the bench.

Not a trace of last night's prank was on her face. There was the same, cold, set, Egyptian-mummy cast of countenance, the same tart, metallic ring of voice that they had encountered the night before. Either she was innocent or a Bernhardt. Now the outside door opened and Milton Cobb, bearing a pail of milk, stepped in from the wings. He looked squarely at them, his round face blooming as the harvest moon, sang out a very cheery good morning and, as a climax, hoped their "bones rested well last night." Truly the center of the platform belonged to Milt. Could Henry Irving have surpassed? Snowdon and Co., the laurels snatched from them without a call for any of their latent talent, stood there looking wilted, Jim rumpling his disheveled hair and his satellite standing on one leg like a rooster in the frost, neck drawn in and eyes partly closed. But Snowdon was quick to rally. He affably returned pleasant morning greetings, then said it would be an exquisite pleasure to bathe at the spring. And they made their exit for the water-trough.

"So you think, mister, hallucination is running rampant here on Nubbin Ridge; that it's contagious, much the same as lethargy was in 'Sleepy Hollow,' eh? That I saw no

pumpkin visage at the window, no cow feeding on the remains this morning; that old Cobb's clear countenance proves beyond a doubt he possesses a clear conscience,"—this from James as they were vigorously scrubbing at the log, blowing and spouting water like whales.

"Further, that you don't harbor any musketry around a bed where I sleep unless you are out of it. Add that, Mr. Snowdon. You had listened to the old man's cant with high amusement, which no doubt is equally strong in causing nerve excitement as fear or wonder and you dreamed—saw what you couldn't wide awake," returned Cad tersely.

"You mean a perception of objects which have no reality like delirium tremens or—"

"Tremens or nightmare," laughed Cad throwing him the towel.

"Well, next time the fit comes on him, I'll catch the old bird alive and hold him up to you for inspection—myth or material," said James as he vigorously plied his towel. "Meantime let it drop; don't break up the concert but wait. Woo! this morning is cool. Now for pancakes!"

Whereupon he dashed airily back to the cabin followed by the gleeful Allen who cried "Spooks!" just as he was about to open the door. Jim turned and flung him a warning look but had to choke down a laugh before he could enter.

Oh, those pancakes dressed with money! Fried chicken done to a palate-teasing brown! Coffee, aroma Arabia! How they feasted! Milton in the highest of spirits! Ibbey wishing to be but knowing not how! James expanding gradually at the equator, Cad likely to burst in the same latitude!

"I am an Epicurean, not a glutton," said Snowdon politely refusing the last cake.

Cad sorrowfully resisted the temptation to take it. Reluctantly old Milt rose: "Wal, ye wanted me to direct ye to Henshaws' to hire Riley. I'll have to do it airily. Had a terrible dream last night. Seen an army fightin' for the Barrens. Oil spoutin' higher'n the clouds. Fur flyin' to see who owned it. Found two bee-hives upset this morn-

in' 'n' the honey gone. Hog with one ear nearly tore off. Work of a bear I reckon. Gate open 'n' old cow in 'n' eat up all the garden what's not down in the ground. I'm goin' to fix some traps. Set 'em down in the woods where the varmint comes up. Bait 'em with honey 'n' woodchuck meat. If it was a bear, I'll have him." This was all said with the clearest of countenances and apparent honesty. Jim was more dumbfounded. Was the world topsy-turvy?

When they started for the road where Milt claimed he could best "motion off" the direction to Henshaws', Aunt Ibbey followed into the yard with some herbs rolled up in a newspaper.

"Here, Mr. Snowdon," she said, "I'd like ye to take this with ye to Henshaws'. Jerushy has a somethin'—well a kind of a heratic—don't know jest what 'tis. Tell her to steep this wormwood 'n' take it in big doses. Try it for a spell."

"You've a nice yard here, Mrs. Cobb," said Jim taking the herbs.

"O, kinder. If we git oil, I'm going to have a condition built to the house 'n' then set out the yard full of scrubbery 'n' have it look like somethin' round here."

"Yes 'n' a bay winder on the smoke-house, a new bottom to the spring, a couple o' piannies, bristles carpet 'n' a cultivator to lift ye up stairs with," augmented Milt, looking knowingly at Jim.

"'N' ye a bar'l o' whiskey. Milt Cobb, ye place one hand on yer hip and then ye're a jug," she retorted.



## IV

### JERUSHY

In their brisk morning walk, James and Cad were delighted at every step of the way. The day was perfect in its beginning. The sun, gloriously ascending the sky, cast a golden glow over the hills. Every bush and tree bore the tints of autumn. Goldenrod with long racemes of rich yellow and gentian bearing clusters of sky-blue bordered the wayside. The road zigzagged in the climb, now passing through a rocky copse of birches, where a covey of pheasants burst out on whirring wing to scatter in the groves; and again through a bosk of emerald hemlock, the branches of the young trees quite down to the ground, where rabbits left cover and went bounding and thumping into the deeper woods. But not until the road led through a low growth of chestnut and oak, came the crowning sight of the morning. A gray squirrel leaped across the way in slow graceful bounds, his glossy coat flashing silver in the sunlight, the long fluffy tail whisking light as thistle-down. He sprang upon the trunk of an oak several feet from the ground and there paused a moment, regarding the intruders before making the ascent into the branches. At the poise the two stood spellbound. Cad longed for a gun.

"Why kill such a beautiful little animal as that when they're so scarce nowadays?" tenderly inquired Jim, striving to catch another glimpse of the frisky little fellow.

"Somebody'll get him! might as well be us," Cad returned in defence, gathering up stones. "I'd like to wear that tail round my face and I'd sure have some whiskers to beat old Milt's fleece."

"Nothing but enemies for the gray squirrel. Since hunting is only a sport, he is doomed for extinction, at least in near woods. Better not throw. You are likely to hit me," said Jim starting on.

Disappointed, the would-be Nimrod emptied his hands into the tree-top.

"See, Cad, what's in the road ahead of us!" called Jim suddenly. He had rounded a sharp turn, the bushes and rocks obscuring him from Cad.

Cadmus rallied to the call and as he made the curve beheld what appeared to him some hideous beast of the jungle.

"What is it?" he yelled.

This back hill country of scrub oak and rocks still retained a primitive breed of swine that roamed at will feeding on mast much the same as when the country was new. Here was a strain of the lost thistle-digger pedigree, a mother and a dozen small pigs. Tall, long, bacon-sided, thin-hammed, head and snout half the length of the frame, ears erect, sharp and pointing, long tail, bristles standing like porcupine quills, the hustler for this large family presented a most uninviting front. The deep-booming ominous warning served notice of the blockade. It was effectual. Had she discovered the adversary at a distance, true to the habit of her species she would have run. Close proximity aroused maternal instinct. The moment that she halted at the disquieting discovery and braced for the fray, the brood, having nothing at stake beyond dinner scruples, gathered round her, squealing and tugging.

"Pick your perch. She'll charge the moment we move, maybe before," warned Jim in a low voice, keeping well alert.

"Gee, but the little cusses are cute!" exclaimed Cad in reckless admiration.

Just then whizz went a club past James and struck the irate brute on the head. Cad had thrown it. The gauntlet was down; she accepted the challenge and rushed. By almost superhuman maneuvering Snowdon gained the low branches of a tree just in time to escape the crouching jaws. The woods echoed with indescribable, hair-lifting rage.

"You foo—" he panted as he peered out of his retreat in the direction of Allen, who had taken refuge on a high rock well out of reach. James produced material for a

cigarette, rolled one, lit it and began composedly to smoke above the frenzy, waiting a chance of escape.

"Don't think there's any use of getting excited," called over the source of their not too envious predicament. "I don't fear her."

"Those that know nothing fear nothing," calmly answered Jim.

"How long do you s'pose she'll hold us? Pig! Pig! Pig!" Cad called. The bellicose avenger was soon grunting at the base of the rock. His fortress had now become the chief objective in the spirited campaign. A view of the ferocious animal at close quarters—froth flying from the cadaverous mouth as she snapped off or tore up bushes—convinced him that the hog when roaming the woods stands high in the category of dangerous denizens.

Action began in the tree. Over at the rock, Allen was so occupied in entertaining his company that he failed to notice Snowdon drop behind the tree-trunk. Undiscovered, Jim backed to another tree and slipped behind that; then another until he was quite out of sight and where it was safe to run. Circling, he soon came to the road again beyond a bend and seated himself on a log to await the emancipation of his hampered friend. Presently he heard him call: "Jim! Jim Snowdon!" The call was followed by a flow of language that bordered strongly on execration, then died down into something like despair.

"Teach him, perhaps, not to be quite so impulsive," mentally commented James. "Throw a club when I was in such a ticklish position as that! He's about as emotional as an Italian." Then he added aloud, "Poor kid!"

Comrades they had been for some time. Allen was an odd mixture of absurdities, prone to pull the trigger first and make inquiries after, while Snowdon was a solid composition of acumen, avoiding the pitfalls into which Allen was continually plunging. Opposites in temperament, yet their attachment was like that of David and Jonathan.

Snowdon pulled a revolver from his hip pocket and looked it over. To shoot the hog, was to raise the ire of Nubbin Ridge. Grimly he emptied two chambers in the

cylinder of empty shells, then refilled them. Their lives were in jeopardy and if the animal failed to tire in reasonable time and allow them to proceed on their way he would clear the road and the law would defend him. Just as he rose for the ordeal pattering footsteps arrested his attention and Cadmus Allen hove in sight around the turn, much flurried. The moment he discovered Snowdon standing in the road ahead laughing, he burst into a jubilant guffaw, and slackened speed. He was coatless.

"Where's your coat?" inquired Jim of the fugitive as he came up.

"Threw it to the old sow," Allen panted. "And while she was busy fixing it up, I broke jail; slid down the opposite side of Gibraltar and made a get-away by cuttin' curves and dodging behind friendly trees and rocks."

James laughed long and loudly; by the time he had finished several fits of mirth, Allen had regained breath sufficiently to move on in quest of new adventures. Their merry voices attested that the novel experience had served but as a stimulus to pitch their spirits high. Shortly they came upon an old man standing under a tree, looking up very interestedly into the top. He held a gun and was sighting game. He turned to the strangers. Leathern-faced, tousled and grizzled, his eyes purging peach-tree gun, he seemed to have weathered his three score and ten and yet appeared hale. With head tipped back, he gravely gazed upon them with bleared and mournful eye, much as Methuselah might have gazed upon young Lamech. James courtly advanced and inquired the distance to Henshaws'.

"Squirrel jest run up this tree," he answered, his voice deep and hollow enough to have come from the depths of the catacombs.

"How far is it to Henshaws,' please?" repeated James drawing nearer.

"Went into a hole up there," continued the old man, at the same time placing a hand behind a blanket-like ear, expansive enough to have arrested sound waves from Europe.

"How far is it to Henshaws'?"—louder.

“He’ll be stickin’ his head out by’n-by.”

“How far is it to Henshaws’?” shouted Jim, rising on tiptoe.

“I’ll salt ’im soon as he looks out his winder,” leered the old Nimrod.

“You’re an old fool” yelled the ever indiscreet Allen, to Snowdon’s complete discomfiture.

“The woods ’pears to be jest full of ’em this mornin’,” calmly returned the old man as he shifted his gaze to the tree-top again.

While Allen pondered, James hastily intervened.

“Since the atmosphere is cleared, since our mental caliber is classified, measured up to, so to speak, think we’d better jog on,” he laughed. “There’s the pine ahead where we turn in.”

Down through the bushes a short distance from the main road they came to a farm-opening. It lay in a saucer-like depression. Streams oozed out in many places on the slopes, meeting in a brook bordered by alders and willows that idled southward to a cleft in the basin rim, where it leaped down and joined Hazel Fork, which separated the better lands from the Barrens. Along the woods where they were standing ran a stone wall. A lane, walled with stone, led down to the buildings on more level ground and ended at the barnyard. On a gentle slope at the right, stood the low brown house, quite sequestered by a variety of trees, low and twisted, giving evidence of sterile soil that had to be enriched to yield fair returns. But it was home and over it all lay an atmosphere of content. Far back from the outside world the inhabitants no doubt were enjoying a quiet little world of their own. Such were appearances without. When they had gained the house James wondered if a rap on the door might reveal something different within. No response. Another rap without success.

“I saw a side door standing open as we came down the lane,” volunteered Allen. “Let’s try that.”

Before they reached it, however, out upon the narrow veranda whisked a tall, spare woman who stared wonderingly at them with large, gray, popping eyes. She was the replica of Miss Ophelia—hair pulled back taut in a chignon.

Two small tight curls, the length of a finger, played over each high cheek bone, witcheries to captivate foolish hearts. The gown she wore indicated a pinch of pattern for the emaciated figure was plainly suggested beneath.

As she stood in state, apparently awaiting an inquiry, James, the extraordinary, set one foot upon a step, placed a hand upon a post of the porch and said: "Good morning, madam. Is Mr. Henshaw, Mr. Riley Henshaw, at home?"

Back so far went the head there seemed danger of her losing equipoise. The voice, the physique, the face of the stranger would have been responsible for the disaster had she gone over backwards. Like the Queen of Sheba at beholding the glory of Solomon, there was no more spirit in her. But with the low courtesy that counterbalanced the back action, she gave an answer which, no doubt, she thought would please the ear of gentry.

"Indirectly. He elevated the ax to his shoulder and proceeded to the forest to procure some fuel for the ensuing winter," she said in the squawkish voice of an educated parrot.

Snowdon maintained well his dignity, but Cadmus averted his face skyward, presumably to watch a hawk sailing and wheeling the cerulean blue.

Noticing James halting for speech, she continued, "No accidents occurring, peradventure he may return by the time the sun reaches the zenith."

"Is Mr. Henshaw your son?" James inquired, casting about for words.

"Oh, no! indeed, no! He is my youngest brother," she cackled drily, piqued at what might possibly be a reference to her age.

"Fine spring of water you have here," he said, turning to a font in the bank a few feet from the walk. It was walled and arched with stones, now mossgrown, while around it grew planted ferns which throve in the dampness and the darkness of a cluster of spruces. "Reminds me I'm thirsty."

"Wait till I get you a glass," she said, starting for the door.

"No, there's a cup. I'll drink from that,"—and he went on followed by Cad while she took a seat beside the door and watched them drink with open pride.

"We've the best water in the world, I do believe, here in these hills," she began when they came back to the veranda. "Old Mrs. Bolivion moved west from here when they were first married, and before she died—well, it just seemed she couldn't die, in fact, till they brought her back and she drank water from these springs again; then she peacefully left this mundane sphere."

"Poisoned her likely," broke in the reprehensive Cad.

"Beg pardon, it didn't. This spring is always running sweet and pure," she said with spirit, resenting the aspersion.

"Doesn't run nights does it?"

"What doesn't run nights?"

"Your spring."

"My spring?"

"Anybody's spring."

"Doesn't run nights! Who told you our spring doesn't run nights? I keep my window raised and it is such sweet music to hear that springwater bubble-bubble-bubble all the livelong night; just makes me drowsy and lulls me to sleep."

"Doesn't run when the moon shines does it?"

"Moonshine! As if—I tell you that spring runs night and day!" and she smacked a small bony fist into the palm of the other bony hand better to mark the emphasis.

James concluded the time for interference was ripe: "Don't think Mr. Allen serious, madam. He had a struggle for his existence on his way here this morning and I notice he hasn't calmed down yet."

"Mr. Allen?" she queried. "Yes, Mr. Allen. And you are?"

"Snowdon is my name," responded James.

"O, yes; Mr. Snowdon and Mr. Allen." She was growing very gracious, fairly ogling James. "The news reached us this morning. You are the oil men. Going to operate

the Barrens. Yes, yes; I am so elated, so perfectly elated. And, Mr. Allen, you had trouble on the way. I notice you are not wearing a coat. Perhaps your trouble isn't settled. I *do* hope you have not come here for any. Our country is at peace now with all the world except Washington. There is always a fight on in Washington. I do wish our church would set apart a day each week for prayer and fasting for our Capitol. Please sit down for I see my brother returning from the forest. Won't you come up here and have some chairs? All right; the steps are quite clean. Yes, Father, Brother and I reside here alone. Brother was in the Texas oil fields for awhile. Had to come home and take the farm when Decatur married. Pop is in the woods hunting for a hog. She's been gone for ever so long." (At this part of the recital Allen nudged Snowden in the ribs.) "But, pray, Mr. Allen, who set upon you this morning in the forest that you should cast your coat?"

"A fond and idolizing mother," he quickly responded, "with a family of twelve descendants, all at the breast. There was a very unhappy understanding at the beginning; she became suddenly inoculated with the erroneous premonition that we evilly intended to disorganize her family. Very abruptly, she set upon Mr. Snowden in a most frenzied manner and hastily he was forced to take refuge in a tree to escape the wrath to come. Then she gave her undivided attention to me for a time, where I was very unwillingly held in duress upon the Rock of Ages. The happy thought occurred to me that she might be a tailoress when at her trade so thereupon I threw my coat to her to renovate as best befit her taste and soon she was very busy with the remodeling. When I found an opportunity, I absconded while she was ripping out the sleeves. According to her wise judgment, no doubt, the armholes were too small. And there you have it."

As the jargon progressed, James grew uncomfortable. Where would it lead? Miss Henshaw's eyes increasingly dilated while a look of wonder and bewilderment overspread her face as the tale lengthened and the mystery



deepened. When Cad had finished, keeping his face yet sidewise to her as he had done throughout the narrative, she gasped out: "Who in this world can it be and where does she reside?"

"Resides at Henshaws' if I am not mistaken," pestered the wag, never so happy as when breeding disturbance.

She was thunderstruck. She was on the verge of collapse. Her hands went up, imploringly.

"As my name is Jerushy Henshaw—as I am Jerushy Henshaw—"

"Dear lady," interrupted James, jumping up, "he means an old hog. Possibly it is the one that strayed from here. She was in the road with a litter of pigs and disputed the right of way with us. Do not let it annoy you. Mr. Allen has a mania for romance."

He had apologized for the trickster and the trickster looked defeated. Jerushy did not return at once from the chaos into which she had been led. She was subject to mild fits of hysteria. She had deeply wondered at a virago in the woods but to have it flung in her face that the creature was a Henshaw had brought on an aggravated paroxysm. The debonair strangers had early won her heart. Then to have one of them heap such opprobrium upon her later, notwithstanding her strained effort at vocabulary, had been the whole straw-stack to break the camel's back. She was alternately weeping and laughing, characteristic symptoms of the malady. James, confounded, watched the twitching eyes, large now as white door knobs.

"It's the 'innocuous desuetude,' something known only to the late Grover Cleveland, that's taken her. Water may revive her," cried Allen in terror as he leaped for a pail standing on the steps and went rushing for the spring.

Had James been positive that Jerushy were dying, he could hardly have repressed a smile at the now frantic Allen. "Don't throw that full pail of water on her or I'll dip you in the spring," he warned as Allen came dashing up ready to douse her. "I'll bathe her face and wet her head with some. It may revive her," beginning to apply it.

"Don't wet those little curls, Snowdon; it'll take the kink all out of them 'n' she'll be mad if she wakes up. Wish her brother would hurry: Wonder if we could find some camphor."

"She does not reside here," gagged Jerushy, taking a turn for the better, apparently.

"Sure, she's coming down the lane now," piped up the recalcitrant Allen. It was well intended. Now the atmosphere would be clarified and Jerushy, he felt sure, would come out of her fit when she saw the pig.

"Shut your foolish mouth, will you," chided Jim as he diligently chafed the face and hands of the sufferer. "You would quarrel over a straw. Throw her into a relapse will you."

"Belay there, Doctor! If you take the crimp out of that other curl there with your cold water cure, you'll wish for a flying machine when she discovers the damage you've done."

"When her brother gets here, he'll deal with you. Hunt a towel inside to dry her face with," commanded Jim dryly. "Believe she will rally presently if you don't break out again."

"Wish she'd raise her head and look up the lane at that Homeric pastoral scene spread out before us. Instead of a shepherd driving homeward a bleating flock in the last rays of a sinking sun, it's a swine-herder bringing in a drove of hogs, and that mother of the prolific bearing is the very one that held you so artistically treed, Jim," said Allen, pulling a cloth off a line at the end of the veranda and handing it to him.

Jerushy raised her drooping head. Much of the wild stare had left her eyes. Allen's description fell upon her ear just as she was coming back to consciousness. Passing the gate, the little pigs were scudding hither and thither, now back to the homely mother again, as she called them in with her "*Honk! honk! Honk! honk!*" while the old man swayed a long pole over them, timed to a "*Ga lang! ga lang* there!" Then Jerushy perceived. He meant a hog! She laughed; she cried! she laughed and cried together while James pitied.

"She *does* reside here, Mr. Allen," Jerushy meekly and weakly confessed as speech returned.

"*Sure!* And she's a *beaut!*" crowed the popin-jay, hopping around. The unfortunate's recovery had restored his peace of mind. Her forgiveness shone out and that, too, would save him a possible brush with young Henshaw, who at this moment was jaunting up the path, ax over his shoulder, with a buoyancy that indicated he was aware of their visit and purpose.

Verily, their advent and their objective had spread like wildfire. The Cobbs that morning had set the news flying. Nubbin Ridge was agog. From farm to farm, over the entire saddle-back even down to the smaller clearings on its withers, the glad tidings had swept before nightfall. Telephone lines were minus, but fleet foot and ready limb carried the intelligence of possible fortune, a fortune somewhere waiting along the hard and flinty way. Their forbears had struggled here before them for the merest claim to existence. But now Dame Fate was about to smile on them and decree that they should live in gilded halls, apparelled in fine cloth and feather, with servants to await their beck and call. Sol Faldin late that day had crossed over the gully and heralded the word to the Hayhows. Enthusiasts were the Hayhows and they early celebrated. Sol must stay and sup. At the table he came very near losing his life; he choked on an onion blade while declaring his set purpose of selling his possessions and sailing for Halifax. Others on that memorable day eagerly placed orders for Fords. Somebody crossed the woods to tell Riley Henshaw that the emancipator against hard-scrabble was then at his very door, calling him to flowery beds of ease. On air he started for the house, his feet disdaining the ground and we have seen him approaching the Baron of the Barrens.

As James stood on the veranda steps, towering above him, his look of nobility nearly swept Riley off his feet. It struck him that this courtly fellow could not possibly be the man who was rooming in old Milt Cobb's cubby-hole? He had anticipated a person something nearer his own caliber, judging from his choice of stopping places and

way of beginning business. Snowdon's appearance, kingly in plain cloth, took him aback. No use now for the "hail fellow, well met" speech he had framed on his way to the house. He merely advanced and bashfully nodded.

Regality, pomposity, dominance were qualities absolutely foreign to Jim Snowdon's nature despite his mien; but with all his effort to counteract the impression of these attributes he felt he was giving Henshaw, Riley, when he understood the purpose of the visit, rolled back his eyes till nothing showed but the whites and humbly and distressfully blurted out: "It's my dumb-struck intentions to make all possible preparations to assist you, Mr. Snowdon."

"And then the boiler blew up,"—Allen again and always at a time when tensions were taut. This time, accidentally, the effect was the thing. Desperate cases need desperate remedies. Accompanying the satire, his face was drawn into such a woe-begone, distressful look—harrowed, miserable—that Snowdon and Henshaw, after taking one long look of amazement, simultaneously burst into loud laughter. Then, of course, with that the bars of conventionality were down and Riley grew normal.

"Come let us be seated and hold communion," laughed James, acting the part of host as he camped on the edge of the veranda.

In the talk that followed, Riley early displayed first-hand knowledge of the business which Snowdon proposed to launch: the tapping of the Barrens. Riley's understanding of the lay of the territory, his opinion as to where roads could best be built, his past experience in the oil fields, soon proved to Jim's mind that his services would be invaluable. Thus the next day would see the beginning of a venture that threatened—threatened certain potentialities!

Meantime Jerushy had silently withdrawn, crestfallen at the spectacle she had presented, fearful that another market might have been spoiled for her by the disclosure. Mutely showering maledictions on Allen for raising her ire over his asinine remarks that had thrown her into the fit,

she faded into the kitchen, there to take it out battling with the stove, and with dinner preparations.

Old man Henshaw now came bobbing around the corner of the house. He stopped suddenly and gazed blankly at the coterie as he stroked his chop whiskers. Cad muttered something from Exodus regarding Moses fleeing from the face of Pharaoh and Jim bumped him off with his elbow to hush him up. "Looks to me's though she'd got her hands full, Riley. Near's I k'n make out, got fifteen pigs 'n' only got fourteen bottles," said the old man as he passed on into the house.

## V

### THE TENTACLES OF THE OCTUPUS BEGIN TO MOVE

If the pages of a folio were ever enriched by the description of a devil and his inferno, we would attempt it here. There are, it is known, two well defined forms of the monster: the fiery, roaring variety that goes about outwardly giving warning of his iniquity and the subtle reptile that strikes in the dark. But to eschew the uncongenial task of picturing the latter type, we will merely describe a man who was seated at an oak table, massive and carved, in a sumptuous office on the second floor of a large business block in Petrolia. His appearance indicated sixty, though he carried his years well. His hair, silvery gray, was painstakingly cropped in the cut of the times; his steel-gray eyes, ever alert under the high brows, shifted in their glance from merciful to merciless as the action suited; his ample mouth when compressed was a lipless line across the face; in the chin the Phrenologist would read determination and obstinacy. His clothes were immaculate in fit, gray in color and made from a fine woolen texture such as is only fabricated by celebrated Scotch looms. This was John Snowdon. He was tabulating memoranda sheets and letters while a page pussy-footed to his orders with the files.

At another table sat a young man who could be instantly recognized as the proverbial "chip of the old block" though the features were finer and sufficiently subdued to some charm. This was John, Jr. His attention was divided equally between papers before him on the table and a pretty typist busily clicking a typewriter in a corner. Bright hair, soft eyes, sweet lips, waxen complexion—these charms were playing havoc with his work. Just now he had dictated a letter, with smiles, to a boiler works ordering lumber. His father caught him up and

asked him if he would step in at the millinery store on his way home and order oysters! Pretty stenographer smiled! She was not reciprocating his glances. Unrequited love is a burning malady. John, Jr., was burning. To sit there and gaze on beauty day after day—it was driving him mad. He was planning desperate straits if beauty did not yield in due time. Yet he had no thought of wedding an office girl. This, too, was uppermost in the girl's own mind. Unhappy John, Jr.!

The door opened and the postman handed in the morning mail. The page placed it on the table before the magnate. He shuffled the letters and sent part of them to John, Jr.; then he casually scanned the *Morning Sun* till—"umph!" He had struck something momentous. Instantly his face, like Abbe Maury's, featured the seven cardinal sins.

"See here, Johnnie. Read in the 'Personals' what I've checked."

John, Jr., read: "Jim Snowdon and friend, late of Oklahoma, blew in on train 12 yesterday. James is the possessor of the Barrens east of here and expects to test the same for oil. He made short stay in the city, passing on to the field of enterprise. A multitude of friends in Petrolia will join in wishing him unbounded success."

John, Jr.'s, face darkened. He looked up at the elder.

"What you going to do, Dad? Have you an eye on a scout that you can use?"

"Yes," wolfishly snapped the pater wiping his glasses. "I've one fixed; slippery as an old eel though."

"Who is it?"

"Old Milt Cobb of Nubbin Ridge."

"'We are lost the captain shouted  
As he staggered down the stairs.'"

quoted the younger derisively as he leaned back in his chair.

"I'll fix a couple more from town, more reliable, to make sure," said the old man grimly and settled back over his work again.

Could he? Could he crush Jim Snowdon when the opportune time arrived? Wherein lay his power? First, it was conceded he held Petrolia in his right hand. That enviable eminence had been reached by fastening a hold on Big Business. On all leading industries there was felt his iron clutch. As a ward-heeler he was astute and carefully culled henchmen did his work. His was the Throne Room; the mayoralty and town council were wired to it. The wires reached beyond Petrolia. There was a Judge of the Courts elected by the people; but John Snowdon managed to get Snowdon verdicts. Yet John Snowdon always needed money. For this reason, perhaps, he had kept hold of a peculiar claim, a peculiar writing, cunningly shaped it had been, on the Barrens, enacted in years gone by. He had long been waiting a time when the tree would be shaken for its fruit; then he would reach forth and gather in the plums. Peculiarly enough, he had chosen for his victim his brother back in Scotland and affairs thus far had worked easily to the ends desired. Had the hour struck? Yet he feared Jim Snowdon. It was to be Snowdon *versus* Snowdon. The blood was Scotch and the true Scot the world over is known as "either a blessed friend or a cussed enemy." What would James be like when roused? Five years before that time there had been a stormy scene between them and it had been the parting of the ways. Now they were to meet again.

At the hour of ten, the office doors of Snowdon and Son were opened to the public. The usual influx would then begin. Heads of firms and of corporate bodies, politicians, office holders, office seekers—varied were the visitants and their missions, but all came for favors, guidance or advice. The causes for which they came were sometimes discussed openly with the grand Moloch; at other times there would be a closet session when the canon involved secrecy. His power to receive and listen, then encourage or discourage, dispatch or disperse was little short of electric. In personality, he was magnetic, irresistible, drawing other forces to him. His adroitness often baffled attorneys at the bar where he was always a formidable opponent. At times he would be very gracious, play-



ing charity as a card to hold or increase power. In short, Snowdon was an inveigler. Whatever came to his mill was grist.

This proved an active day for Snowdon and Son; yet while Snowdon gave his usual interest on the surface, underneath he had found time before closing to formulate an espionage campaign. Next day the dogs of war were to be loosed for a clandestine hunt in the hills.

\* \* \* \* \*

Business continued brisk as customary in the office of Snowdon and Son—for over two weeks before the mail brought in a report from the Barrens. Her loveliness in the gown of light lawn with the sprays of pale blue violets, paused in her work at the typewriter, for she had caught the name Jim Snowdon mentioned by the Heads. They were seated at the head table, obviously pouring over a map, now tracing, now pointing places and engaged in low, animated conversation. Yes, Jim! She had read he was back from Oklahoma. Her face kindled with a strange light. She was bonnie Jean MacCrea and she was Jim Snowdon's friend—just a friend. What were the arch fiends up to now? She was slowly beginning to regard them as such. Were they after Jim? They had quarreled over property five years before when he had left Petrolia, this she knew and now—well, her surmises were grave. Gathering up a sheet of paper, a half finished letter, she crossed the room to where they were seated and paused beside John Junior's chair. He turned as she pointed out a trivial error in the wording. Very naturally she suggested an improvement while his hand stole up to hers on the paper and the touch, warm and velvety, set his heart beating like a trip-hammer! Enough, and as she fell away from him her eyes swept the folio on the table. "Map of the Barrens" was what she read. And the work appeared to be a complete topography—hills, hollows, streams, down to minute details—the plot executed by a professional hand.

"Um! located his well near the Hermit Spring. Wonder if he knows that a dry hole was found not thirty rods from there," said the elder as she took her chair. James was to be hit not by a Mauser bullet but by a

“bombshell,” she clearly foresaw, once the guns were in position.

“O, Jim, they’re after you!” she breathed as she settled down to her work again. “I’ll warn you tonight. I cannot forget your kindness and I’ll repay.”

“Building a fine road up there from Comfort, so says the letter,” Snowdon went on. “Half a dozen teams at work. Must consider it a permanent stand, eh? Erecting a double log house out of old dead pines, oriental and ornamental, by that fountain.”

“Wonder how he’s financed?” spoke up John, Jr., taking his eyes with difficulty from the diaphanous vision seated with her back to the plate glass window between the large showy Ferns of Florida that he had placed at each side as fit setting for Jean’s loveliness.

But their minds were suddenly drawn from speculation. A burst of brazen song smote their eyes. The performer, coming along the corridor outside, was vocalizing with the loud pedal in strident falsetto, mezzo, legato, staccato.

“‘O, when I was single, O, then, O, then.’”—

Old John dropped his hands and looked his disgust in the superlative. Young John looked foolish and blank. Jean perked up her head and stopped her work to listen. Only the page laughed. The song-dervish was coming nearer. Uproarious laughter outside now accompanied the ribaldry.

“Drunk!” said the elder Snowdon.

“Drunk!” squawked the green parrot from its rustic cage beside a fern. The bird had been an innovation solely for Jean’s amusement.

“‘O, when I was single,’” it squawked again.

“Wring its neck,” Snowdon snapped irritably at the page. He had held a contempt for the bird and its purpose from the first.

The song stopped. A voice of Bashan inquired: “Is this the main entrance to the pow-wow chamber of the Great Wang-a-Wang of the Most High Wack-a-Whacks—door to the Wack-a-Whacks?”

“Door to the Wack-a-Whacks?” mocked Poll Parrot.

Snowdon hurled a book at the bird and knocked the cage to the floor from which the feathered talker indulged in

incomprehensive garbles and unsavory remarks. Jean flew to the rescue and set the cage upright on the floor. She had never felt any interest in the bird before. Meanwhile, John, Jr. was divesting himself of his coat at the door, preparing to do battle. An athlete of local notoriety, he would likely give a good account of himself should the buffoon continue the game upon entrance. The door now pushed open and in walked Milton Cobb, respected citizen of Nubbin Ridge, with the air of a ruler of the realm. No sign of tipple—just a jocular, independent air as he doffed his hat and bowed low to no one in particular. The rubicund face in its frame of white fringe, the rusty Prince Albert coat of other days reaching to the knees, the manner all combined, perhaps, to cause the parrot to cry out shrilly: "*Raus mit ihm!*" whereupon Jean arranged papers over the cage, thinking to still further oratory.

Milt kowtowed in obsequious manner as before royalty; John, Jr. reluctantly got into his coat, every fiber of his being surcharged with grouch, while old John, slow to grant amnesty, reservedly came forward.

"You have a powerful pair of lungs, Mr. Cobb. Why this buffoonry in getting into the office? I ought to call a policeman and have you jailed. Your conduct is entirely unwarranted—shocking, sir."

Behind Milt a crowd had gathered, some from curiosity, others on business and this disorder was adding to the embarrassment of the situation. Regardless of the part he wished Cobb to play, John Snowdon resolved he would not tolerate the ridiculous spectacle another moment. "Out with your business here," he said "or I'll throw you into the hall, sir."

"I come unto the House o' Grab to see how much in-t'rest ye have piled up against me 'n' see if ye don't think ye'd better foreclose that mortgage ye've schemed to git holt of to make me do yer dirty work," was old Milt's outspoken and undaunted answer.

Shades of the mighty! What had broken loose! This old man did not fear power and was bearding the lion in his den! Crying him out publicly. What had started him out of the hills, bellowing on his way? John Snowdon,

invariably stable under fire, was now seized with a fear akin to panic.

"Come in here, Cobb," he said, throwing open the door to his privy council room and waving those waiting an audience on to the second in power, who had resumed his accustomed place.

"Door to the Wack-a-Whacks!" dismally moaned the parrot from its improvised prison.

"See that that thing is killed, John, before I get out there again," the elder called back as he slammed the door after him.

"Got things nice in here, too," said Milt suavely as he took inventory of the two deep seated chairs upholstered with finely finished leather.

Snowdon pushed the chairs around to confront each other and pointed to one for Milt, all the while remaining mute, as yet too full for utterance. After they were seated, he continued to glower for a full minute before opening the case. The old man's conduct had been preposterous and dangerously daring. He fully intended to mete drastic reward. While he was whetting his tongue, old Milt gazed up at the brilliant electric lights in childish admiration, unmindful of impending fates.

"Well, Cobb, what has cut loose up in your country to send you down here to bawl me out in this style? I mean, now get me, who is behind you in this movement? You've had some tip that emboldens you; you've some support and are assured that you are not to be thrown out of that nest of yours else you wouldn't invite me to shake it. *Who is it?*" He glared. He felt he knew who it was but wished old Milt to admit it to better the lead.

Old Milt lowered his gaze. Their eyes met and fastened. Milton shifted his cud and chewed slowly on it for a brief minute before replying. "Ye're barkin' up the wrong tree, Snowdon. The game ye're alludin' to, ain't workin' up there. Ye've got into some sort of a fight, Snowdon, with yer nephew. What 'tis I don't know 'n' care less. To help ye in yer hunt after him, ye buy a debt over me which means if I don't furnish ye with the information ye want, ye propose to shove me

out into the road. Wife 'n' I have talked it over. We love our little old home. 'Tain't wuth much, yit it stands atween us 'n' the poorhouse. But, John Snowdon, we've concluded that ye hain't got money 'nough if ye throw in Petrolia to hire us to sell out to the devil"—and with it down came his fist on the arm of his chair with a bang.

"Sell out to whom?" fairly shouted old John leaning forward.

"To ye," bellowed old Milt leaning forward likewise, their heads nearly meeting, much like roosters bantering and craning their necks in a sparring bout.

Back went old John's head. "I see it, I see it. After Jim got up there, you disgorged yourself to him completely. He made you some proposition better than I held up to you. You simply sell out to the highest bidder. That is the way the land lies. You are not acting from principle in this matter. In the first place, I should not have taken you into confidence. I have acted within the law. I hold a claim, an option, on the Barrens. Jim is fully aware of it. If he burns his fingers, who is at fault? I bought an honest debt over you. I offered you quit claim if you acted as my agent, to my interest, remember, without any infringement of the law. Jim is sharp you'll find and I must meet him fair or foul. Yes, I begin to see Jim's hand already. It's his trick this time, though he has swung trump on a very low card. I have all mine back yet. It's his lead."

"Do ye insinooate that I told Jim Snowdon ye wanted me to furnish ye samples o' sand that he found and at what depths?"

"Disgorged yourself. Yes."

"Now ye're off yer eggs agin onto the straw. I was ashamed to tell it to any one but Ibby. 'Twould look as though I'd earned sich a reputation that I have my price."

"Has Jim been at your place?"

"There 'n' stayed several nights till he got a tent up over at the springs. My wife's doin' their bakin' 'n' I tote it over to 'em."

“And you didn’t talk this matter over with him while there?”

“If I’m tellin’ a lie as ye think I am, how many times do ye want to hear it?” irritably boomed Milt.

“Did he mention my name?” Old John was waxing into better humor and becoming interested.

“Him! I tried to draw him out on his esteemed uncle several times, but it was like quizzin’ a clam. Beyond admittin’ ye *are* his uncle, he seems almost to gag on anything connectin’ yer name. But he’s one o’ the finest appearin’ chaps I ever met. And to do him dirt, I’ll put my hand in the fire first. He’s a thorough Christian—got a clean, white heart ’cordin’ to my small peck measure o’ judgment.”

“What church does he attend up there? What are his tenets?” cynically inquired old John.

Milt ignored the cut and started in to extol Jim’s virtues. “He don’t do any wind work; don’t swear when he pinches or hits his fingers; don’t lampoon people behind their backs. He’s got half a dozen men ’n’ three teams workin’ fer him up there, buildin’ a road up from Comfort; goin’ to have it so’s he c’n run a car up to the springs. Wal, he works hardist of all. Don’t rush his men ’n’ rests ’em once in a while. Old Wilder, the backwoods preacher, come through there one day. One of his shoes was nearly off his feet. Jim sets down and looks at it a little bit, then pulls off his own shoes ’n’ ’lows he’d like to trade. How the men laughed ’n’ even the poor old man laughed ’n’ didn’t want to take Jim’s shoes. But Jim made him do it ’n’ he drawed a blessin’ ’n’ tears from that old man as he went on his way rejoicin’. Jim Snowdon is the kind that does religion, don’t talk it, I can see that ’thout puttin’ on my specs.”

John Snowdon grew meditative. Finally he said: “Don’t see how your bringing me the sand, if he finds oil sands, could be to his material injury. He knows of the claim; has it to meet at some date in some way. What could a little bit of sand amount to?”

“Nothin’. Ye’ll need a car load ye’ll find ’n’ anuther

one o' gravel with it when ye begin to bump up against him. He's jest the sort that'll make fur and hair fly once he's cornered," old Milt warned. "Got the strength of an ox to back it. Come nigh upsettin' my house first time he was gittin' into it."

John Snowdon rose. He looked at his watch. Furtively he looked at Milt. "Nearly noon," he said, "and nothing done. You go back to the hills, Milt, and bridle your tongue. Keep perfectly quiet about this affair. Needn't pack up to move right away. If you have gathered to pay interest, use it. Don't worry. And I am not seeking to rob Jim either. Just want my own if—just what the law hands to me; always abide by the law. Use it of course as an instrument to attain ends. What else is it for?"

"Yes, 'n' stretch it a good deal," said old Milt rising. "My opinion is, John, ye twist it round to pinch people till they squeal. All law can be abused and misused. 'N' my b'lief is when ye are lawbidin' 'n' good is when the law makes ye so. In my case, ye don't want to pinch me now cause 'twould show bad for yer comin fight—pushin' me out for not workin' for ye in the dark. Ye moved up the wrong checker 'n' now ye want it to stand still for a spell, eh? My opinion is 'twon't ever git to the king-row. Give it another push, John, when ye're feelin' like it." And Milt strode to the door.

Snowdon had caught the implication. Public opinion would be on Milt's side and he knew it to be grievously dangerous to take up arms against public opinion, law or war.

"You'll want a good warm dinner, Milt, to travel back on," he said, extending him a silver dollar. "Go home happy. You won't be disturbed by me."

"Keep yer dollar. Ye'll need it 'fore ye git through with Jim." And old Milt passed out through the doors into the hall. He muttered to himself as he ambled along: "I've silenced his bat'ries on one corner o' the battlefield for a while I guess. Hit him with a well-aimed wad I cal'late. Ibb'y'll rest better nights; quit 'er rollin' 'n' tossin' 'n' twittin' me o' havin' a cow 'n' five dollars when she married me 'n' askin' what has she now."

He turned. He had felt a light touch on the arm and at the same time a feminine voice, the sweetest he believed that he had ever heard, said: "Mr. Cobb." It was bonnie Jean MacCrea, her hat on for the street. "I am Mr. Snowdon's secretary," she continued. "I saw you in the office. I would so love to speak with you. I am going out to dinner. Won't you please come to the elevator and we will drop down together," she laughed, as naturally as the brook ripples. Then quickly she added thoughtfully: "I will tell you of a token I wish carried to the hills to a friend, to—Jim Snowdon," falteringly.

"Will I! Will I!" exclaimed old Milton, his eyes beaming. "To Jim Snowdon! To the best feller in Pennsylvania; and if he's yourn, ye've picked a dandy!" By this time they were skipping for the elevator, Milt light as a feather from the contact with youth. There was such gaiety about her, such spontaneity. He felt he could pack a ton for her in the hills.

Just as the elevator started Jean caught a glimpse of John, Jr. in the corridor, desperation on his face, parrot cage in hand, making giant strides to catch up with them. Poor Polly was to suffer eviction. Jean bit her lips to suppress a laugh.



## VI

### THE "ACT" AT THE ARLINGTON CAFE

Many curious glances were cast at the pair as they hastily dodged their way through the noonday crowd. They must avoid John Jr. He would follow by the stairway Jean felt assured. She had formulated a plan to ask Milt to dinner; then over their coffee she could casually speak of Jim, an old acquaintance, of course, and make her request that he carry a packet containing a gift enveloping a secret message of warning, the only way she could plan to reach him quickly. Two doors below was a café, rather *bon ton* for a countryman but quick and convenient. Thither she guided Milt, never pausing until they were well within the entrance. Young Snowdon would not seek them there, she felt, even if he had seen them together before they dropped out of sight. It was not a place she frequented.

"Now, Mr. Cobb, you are about to dine with me," she divulged, "and while we are—"

Up went his hand in protest. "Oh, my girl, I hain't—got——"

——"time, Oh, yes, you have," she interposed to save him embarrassment. "I—I want to treat you as you are going to do an errand for me, you know," she began, referring prematurely to her plan, "going to carry a package. Oh, something Jim will be so pleased to get from his native land, and something——"

"Yes, but ye hain't got to hire me to do it. Look at my old hat fer sich a scrumptious place as this," he demurred as he looked through the opening upon the tables glittering with glass and silver. There was sure to be curious scrutiny.

"We will have a table all by ourselves. Take off your hat now, please, and follow me." And it was such a sincere entreaty that she drew him after her like a magnet

to run, as he felt, a gauntlet through a tortuous labyrinth. But bearing himself erect as a drum major, he took up a military step and drew little attention, for Jean espied a vacant booth at her right as they entered the hall, and the march was short.

He breathed his relief in great puffs when she had him safely anchored, his back to the opening. Jean likewise felt relieved. She had not realized the attention his grotesque figure might attract, till she was about to pilot him through the crowded restaurant, and then there was no retreat. As they were entering the booth, a remark from somewhere among the diners caught her ear, something about "May and December," followed by a titter; but she rested quite sure that the old man did not catch the meaning.

"'All's well that ends well'" she mentally congratulated herself after they were happily seated.

"Beats tarnation how quick styles change," observed Milt, missing none of the new sights about him.

"Over night," she smilingly agreed.

"See ye've kept your hat on; s'pose I'd ought to hung to mine," again he observed.

"Oh, Mr. Cobb, do please excuse me," she managed to plead; "but you do say such funny things." And she was tussling in the throes of helpless mirth when the waiter appeared for their order. This had a sobering effect on Jean and she gave him a very liberal one at once.

"Just duplicate it, please," she was about to say, thinking to save a scene, if Milt were asked for an order.

Too late! The waiter gave Milt a curious glance and said to Jean: "What does *he* feed on?"

Milt snatched his opportunity. "W'y, for the first course, waiter, ye might bring me some cold canary tongue and a keg o' pickled elephant. Then for the next four miles, 'blue fish, green fish, fish-hooks, and partridges; fish-balls, snow-balls, cannon-balls and cartridges; gold fish, cat-fish, mocking-birds 'n' ostriches; ice cream, cold cream, vasaline 'n' sandwiches; ketchup, hurry up, sweet kraut and sauer kraut; dished up, hashed up, with little spots o' finny trout; dressed beef, naked beef 'n' beef with

all its dresses on; soda crackers, fire crackers, crackers served with mustard on; beef steaks 'n' mistakes if they are on your bill o' fare; roast ribs 'n' spare ribs 'n' ribs that we couldn't spare; rein-deer 'n' snow-dear 'n' dear me 'n' antelopes; musk-melon, musk-ox, envelopes 'n' cantaloupes; red herrings, smoked herrings, herrin' from old Erin's Isle; Hamburg 'n' limberg 'n' sausages a half a mile; hot corn, cold corn, corn salve 'n' honey-comb; reed birds, read books, sea-bass 'n' sea-foam; fried liver, baked liver, Carter's little liver pills; 'n' how in name o' common sense we ever goin' to pay the bills.' Pardon me, waiter, I plumb forgot to order desert: 'tooth picks, ice picks, picket fence 'n' skeppin' rope; 'n' we'll wash 'em all down with a dozen bars o' shavin' soap'."

The lingo, from an old Irish song, run off in rhythmic sing-song, had been audible in every part of the room. There had been a hush till the finish, then hearty hand-clapping accompanied by peals of laughter. Face to the wall, Jean sat in a crushed and crumpled heap, utterly unable to extricate herself from the dilemma into which she had innocently walked. The waiter had early collapsed. Milt, looking fresh as a sunrise, was giving a drill in the sword exercises with knife and fork and urging the waiter to bring on the "fatted calf."

Then began comments over the room: "They are part of the show tonight; came in here to advertise it to draw a big house." "Isn't he a brick?" "This will go out and spread like wild-fire and the opera house will be packed to suffocation." "The play has never been here before; it's an all-star cast." "This is Uncle Fuller and his daughter, Miss Cloverbloom."

Then the proprietor of the place who had chanced to hear Milt, took advantage. "After they were booked for Petrolia," he lied, "the manager came in here and arranged for this act; knew my house was the best place to advertise, you know; knew the best people in town came in here. Big card he played to draw."

"Place them at the head table then, the 'Guilder-sleeve,' " some one shouted, "and we'll have more fun!"

Jean now sat bolt upright. Her impulse was to rise

and walk out. But what of old Milt? What story would he carry back to the hills? And what would Jim think! Milt was not there of his own volition, she reasoned. If she left, he would believe that she had lured him in to be victimized. Perhaps he believed so already. He had more than held his own, however, and she now felt assured he could hold it to the end. Should she desert him? The falsity of the proprietor nettled her and the Scotch blood of her fathers now began to assert itself. Her final decision was to stand by the ship.

"Carry it through, Mr. Cobb," she said tremblingly just above a whisper. "They began it."

The table in question, the Guilder-sleeve, so dubbed for the reason that the most exclusive only were privileged to sit around mahogany, was at the opposite end of the hall from the entrance. The service used there was the cream of cut glass and silver. Standing in an alcove, banked by flowers, it commanded its price of course.

Today, Mrs. Peter Stuyvesant-Fisk of Petrolia's Smart Set, and a companion of equal social importance were seated at the Guilder-sleeve enjoying that particular *pate de fois gras* for which the Arlington was renowned.

"For the—love—of heaven! what is that, Mrs. Parkins?" she exclaimed at Milt's strange order.

"It's in th' stalls whatever it is!" returned Mrs. Parkins, rather inclined to laugh: "He seems to be taking down the house with his rigmarole."

But at this point in their conversation had come the call to promote the stars to the Guilder-sleeve. They looked at each other in consternation. What! were they to be thrown into company with—associated with vaudeville? Scandal. They started to rise when——

"We want an ocean mermaid to wait on us o' course," was roared out from the box.

"I positively stand on my dignity," asserted Mrs. Peter Stuyvesant-Fisk.

"I absolutely refuse to compromise," protested Mrs. Johnston Parkins.

The waitress soothingly assured them the idea was not Mr. Doolittle's and urged them to resume their seats.

"But" (a plan of escape had occurred to Mrs. Peter)

“we are not averse to taking that little table over there in the corner of the alcove if you care to move our dinner.”

The stand in question was an overflow table for the Guilder-sleeve.

Jean protested when the committee approached them. Her overwrought nerves were at the snapping point. Her brain was in nothing short of a whirl. Fate, the hag, cuts some strange capers, and today at the Arlington, she surpassed herself. Milt requested to be left alone for a moment. The committee withdrew, believing he wished to prompt the actress for another act. In low tones, he urged that they continue the farce to a finish; he would do the performing, she need only walk up and dine. The Arlington people were wholly responsible for the part they were playing. But what if there should be some one in the room who knew her, she urged. True, she knew very few people in Petrolia and none of them were likely to be at the Arlington. Still, an exposure would cost her her position with the Snowdons. Yes, and she would have to flee Petrolia.

“All the better,” reasoned Milt. “Ye c’n jest dig out if it gits too hot fer ye in this little one-horse Injun village.”

“Where could I go and what could I do?” she pleaded anxiously.

“Leave that to Jim. Ye say he lifted ye out o’ miserable poverty once; an’ once he hears the trick that’s been played off on ye in here, as I cal’late to tell ’im, he’ll come into this place and—wal, they won’t be much o’ that mahogany left up there when he gits through. He’ll rid up some. Then he’ll find ye a better place ’n’ that blind tiger ye’re in now. I’d as soon set afore Lucifer. If they’s no other place, old Milt’s got a roof left yit big ’nough to stick yer head under. Just foller me now ’n’ ye’ll wear di’mon’s.”

She followed his lead, impelled by some force, for it seemed to her he was in a way a connecting link between her and Jim again. Dear old Jim! In years gone by he had acted the part of a brother when she was in dire need and he would not fail her now.

P. T. Barnum, the greatest showman in his time, has it in his memoirs that the American people must be hum-bugged; that they seek it, expect it, feed on it,—and he fed them. During one of his tours, the barker for the side-show lustily proclaimed before the canvas, a cherry-colored cat among the living curiosities within. It was—a black cherry.

The Arlington patrons this day were ripe and frenzied for hum-bug. Old Milt's costume, his plump ruddy face blooming as a Hollow-Ee'en pumpkin, his shuffling goose-step, brought screams from the hum-bugged. Even Jean with trepidation and thumping heart smiled faintly.

"O, isn't she pretty!" approved Mrs. Peter Stuyvesant-Fisk as they drew near. "And doesn't she act her part well, just a bashful country lass. Just see that beautiful hair! The simple gown becomes her. Tonight, no doubt, in the final act, she will sparkle with diamonds. I dislike anything rural but that old man as Uncle Fuller is so perfectly artistic that one cannot resist admiring. I never attend rural dramas but I declare I'm tempted to go tonight."

Jean took her seat at the Guilder-sleeve, her back to the audience. Old Milt seated himself opposite to face the trouble, singing,

"There's many a rose in the path o' life,  
If we would but stop to pluck it."

Applause.

Back and almost over his head, two miniature palms standing in tubs quite met in an arch. The effect was ludicrous. While waiting for the feast, Jean kept her eyes straight before her. Milt juggled with a plate whirling it on the end of a knife blade. This brought applause. That feat over, he threw up an oyster cracker and dexteriously caught it in his mouth as it fell. This brought deafening applause. While he was thus performing, Mrs. Peter Stuyvesant-Fisk produced a small lorgnette and leveled it on Jean.

"Mrs. Parkins, would you believe it, that peach bloom complexion of hers is natural."

"Waitin' for that rago!" called Milt in the direction of the culinary entrance. "Is the kitchen in Chicago?"

"What do you think of going tonight, Mrs. Parkins?" asked Mrs. Peter.

"By all means let us go. I am completely carried away with demure Miss Cloverbloom. Don't like the old man overly well. What's the name of the play?"

"'How Uncle Fuller Done the Town,' I think. We'll get up a theatre party, Mrs. Parkins. When we have finished dinner, we'll drive the car round to the Snowdons and invite them. Mrs. Snowdon is not a lover of rural plays but we will persuade her to try this one."

Jean heard this. Her color heightened. Now the dinner came on. In variety and abundance it nearly met old Milt's grotesque order. After it had been deposited and the force who brought it had withdrawn, Jean spoke just loud enough to reach Milt's ear: "We can never pay for it. We'll be exposed right at the clerk's desk when we go out."

"Eat, drink 'n' be merry for to-morrer we die," said Milt unperturbed. "I'll fix a way out of it. Now eat, little girl, 'n' don't worry. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' says old preacher Wilder. If I seen a rope hangin' for me right out there by the door when I come out, I'd try 'n' eat 'nough to break it down. Thought ye was Scotch? Ef ye be, ye hain't showin' Scotch grit. Drat 'em, we'll fix 'em."

Jean began to try hard at swallowing food. Mrs. Peter Stuyvesant-Fisk and Mrs. Johnston Parkins withdrew. Milt had stopped show work and now was feasting like Old King Cole, when several patrons who had finished began to depart.

"Hey, ye tight-wads there! Come up 'n' tip Miss Cloverbloom 'fore ye hog out. In the town afore we reached this greedy hole, she got a bag o' money," called out Milt.

It brought results. Youth, ever eager to stare at lovely maid, came up and poured dimes and quarters beside Jean's plate, while Milt chanted:

"'By two's 'n' by three's they were marchin' up the  
dinnin'-hall,  
Young men, old men 'n' girls that were not men at all;

Blind men, deaf men 'n' men who had their teeth in  
 pawn,  
 Single men, double men 'n' men who had their glasses  
 on;  
 'Twas Miss Cloverbloom that sent out the invitations,  
 And all who came were a credit to their nations;  
 Some came on quick-step because they had no tip to pay,  
 And those who didn't come at all made up their minds  
 to stay away.' ”

Jean almost prayed for the floor to open and let her drop through. Her eyes were downcast; none saw them during the donation. Would she ever live down this day? Never, she felt. There were not mountains and rocks enough to hide her.

“I will go out in the lobby and wait for you there,” she said weakly, rising by the aid of a chair.

“Count up yer money 'n' take it with ye,” said Milt full of cheer. “I won't be out long's anything left here. Order the ambulance or a hearse fer me.”

“I'd touch fire quicker than that money,” she said coldly as she started down the aisle.

The lobby proved to be empty, much to her relief. When she entered, the clerk at the cash register gave her an admiring stare. She sought a retired corner and there sank down on a divan to await the coming of the gourmand. At last he came singing,

“‘My heart is broke with pleasure  
 'N' my back it aches with ease.’

How much ye goin' to tax Miss Cloverbloom for eatin' nothin'?” he said, stepping up to the clerk.

Laughing was in order now at the Arlington; the clerk smiled as he looked over in Jean's direction and said: “Nothing for Miss Cloverbloom, but guess I'll have to have a V from you for all that sea fare.”

Milt hemed and hawed and looked down at his feet and said: “Wal, 'tain't 'nough, mister, but dunno as I have 'nough 'bout me to-day to meet it.”

Again the clerk laughed and told him that out of admiration for Miss Cloverbloom they would split it halves.



Milt fumbled around in his numerous pockets pulling out change and counting it only to announce that he lacked half a dollar.

"O, give me two, then," compromised the clerk. "Say, Uncle Fuller, there are a couple of dandy, nice fellows that would like to take you and Miss Cloverbloom out on an airplane ride this afternoon. They told me to see you when you came out. They are out at the aero park now. If you go, I am to 'phone them at two o'clock and you go up about half past. What say you?"

"Suit me to a T. But Miss Cloverbloom is skeery. She won't go up. Tell 'em I'll be there on apinted time," replied Milt as he walked over and seated himself beside Jean.

"I'll have 'em land me on top o' Sam Hill 'n' that's 'bout a mile from home. Bein' a lover o' nacher, I'll jest nacherly want to wander round 'n' dig some Injin turnip 'n' sassafrack root. I'll manage to git out o' sight in the bushes; then I'll cut my ashes for Nubbin Ridge."

"Oh, they'll search for you, Mr. Cobb! cried Jean. "Then what?"

"Search the devil! Let 'em search," he said, counting tip money. "I've a dollar left. Perty close call. Told ye they'd work a skin game. Now won't ye take what's left, little girl? Ye've dearly ernt it."

Jean threw up her hands in horror at the thought. "We must be quick. Now, here is what I wish you to carry to Jim. It is heather from the braes, from home," she said, holding up a small box.

"Heather. What's that? If I'd a knowed ye had it, I'd a et that, too, like's not."

"It's heather from Scotland and——"

"O, I know where that is. I used to speak in school—  
'Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled,'  
till the winders would rattle 'n' the teacher 'd strike me with a whip to quit."

"It grows on the moors of Scotland. Jim will show it to you when he opens the box. But even then you can not imagine how beautiful it is there. The delicate blossoms that cluster along the dainty branches have all the shades of

pink from deepest to lightest. This is dry and faded, but you can still see what it must be like."

"Why don't Jim plant some here?"

"This variety can't be transplanted, but there is a variety found in the Alps, in Switzerland, that can be."

"Switcherland. I know where that is. I used to speak in school—

'O, take me back to Switcherland,  
Upon its mountains let me stand;  
I c'n see clean over into Heligoland,  
An' ef 'tain't war, then I'll be d——d,  
To whip the world ye understand.'

Wal, I'd git one complete brushin' whenever I'd speak that piece, 'n' no card the last day."

"I must be going now, Mr. Cobb," she said rising, a look of dejection on her face. "Sneak back to—I don't know what to call it."

"Call it! I'd know what to call it if I had to set there with that old Beelzebub," said Milt getting up.

They passed out the door.

"Now, little girl, if it leaks out what them critters rigged up on us there, call fer Jim 'n' me 'n' we'll be down here like the Assyrian that came down on the fold. Don't ye worry nor fear; I'll explain to Jim how they ketched us. He'll be watchin' fer any 'n' all breakers. Jest take ye out o' here to a live taown. Git ye a clickin' job with a white man. Never anything happened in this world, even a war or a murder but what some good come out of it. That's the plan I s'pose. Wal, good bye, little girl, 'n' give my love to old John. 'N' write us how the theater was packed to-night."

He watched her walk away with downcast head; but, instead of keeping on down the street, he saw her disappear into an alley. Into an alley? He started after her to call her back, but already she had disappeared.

## VII

### CABIN RAISING AT HERMIT SPRING

“He-O-Heave! He-O-Heave!” And now the plate timbers, the last logs, were going up on the double log cabin at the Hermit Spring. It was built in the form of two cribs, standing a few feet apart, and the long plates would reach over both compartments thus throwing alley and rooms under one roof when completed. The logs used in the structure were pine from trees left from the stripping of the Barrens in years past and still found in scattered places where the fires had not reached. The apertures between the logs were to be filled with cement; then cement floors; and rough stone fireplaces would be built at the outer ends, until at last a unique bit of woodcraft would stand in romantic isolation in the wilderness.

The ground around the cabin, forested with a low growth, sloped to the east and an opening through the growth permitted a vista of the country below, where a river wound its way through meadow and grove till lost in the distant hills.

Above the cabin stood the acre rock, Big Ben. When the hills were fashioned from the primeval deep, this solitary giant had been heaved to its solitary position. The perpendicular sides rose a scant dozen feet, the colossal mass spreading in broad area. The top was comparatively level, free from crevice, and the leaf mould of centuries had deepened over it till a soil had been formed of sufficient depth to sustain a miniature forest. The rock was a conglomerate; the side toward the cabin was dark gray in color, the surface, thickly inlaid with pebbles, black and pure white and dappled in places with the clinging green rock-moss. Evergreen ferns in exuberance grew along the top close to the edge and in winter many of the fronds were pressed down over the side by weight of the snows to hang in a natural frieze of green. Thus Big Ben had

stood through the ages bearing witness to rock formation beneath the waters.

From beneath the rock, gushed forth the far-famed Hermit Spring. From its basin-home in a niche of the wall, it first spilled over a basin-rim of rock, then glided over white sands between banks of fern and ozier, alder and birch, until at a short distance it widened into the pond fashioned by the Hermit to stay it for a time. Then through a spill-way it slipped away again to join the waters below.

Crab-apple Jones, a prominent figure of Nubbin Ridge, presided at the cabin-rolling. In boyhood days, he had seen log cabins go up and a green memory of those by-gone days enabled him to superintend this out-of-date job without compeer. Tall, angular, tough and withey as iron-wood, he commanded a certain respect as he walked about and pushed the lifting by lusty shouts. He had earned the sobriquet of Crab-apple, or Crab, by arresting two boys for climbing the fence around his orchard and gathering up a handful of fruit. The incident had happened many years ago but the name still stuck.

Nicknaming was a habit dear to the Nubbin Ridge people. It meant no disrespect for the subject, but was a custom practised much the same as Indians give names to members of the tribe for some act, trait, likeness or happening. Others in the crew that day bore fitting titles. There was Fox-trot Bentley, so known because of his trotting gait; Salt Purdy, distinguished for shipping a firkin of butter to a Pittsburgh house and receiving a notice by wire that they had a salt contract with a Syracuse firm but not with him; and Knotty Ferguson likewise distinguished for a delivery of lumber and the receipt of a card which read: "Knotholes received. Please send knots."

Many hands were there that day, the invited, the uninvited, all welcome and all to be treated to a dinner now in preparation. Cad, who was acting as chef, was now down in the hemlocks roasting a large shoat over a camp fire, a generous barbecue, for beside the workers, young and old were in attendance out of sheer curiosity. A cabin three miles up in the hills from the nearest highway!

"Craziest move ever I heerd of. Must be a pair o'

bughouses," mumbled old Uriah Carter to his companion, old Zebulon Hatch. They were seated on a timber, resting their chins on their canes and viewing the folly with shrewd eyes.

"Wonder what they built double for?" mused Uncle Carter, further.

"Mebby the critters intend to git married 'n' one live in each end, makin' handy neighbors," commented the other. "Wonder when their drillin' rig'll be here?"

"Guess they start movin' it up from Comfort tomorrer. More excitement up here now 'n' a house afire. Take a pile o' money it will. That tall, head feller must have a good wad of it; teams haulin' from Comfort. Riley Henshaw is here with his team now, drawin' stone for the fire-stacks; a mason comin' tomorrer to build 'em. Then he's goin' to build a dam below with wheels 'n' belts to run his drill. Thinks it'll be as cheap or cheaper than a boiler 'n' engine 'n' after the drillin' is done goin' to use it to make 'lectricity."

"I want to know!" said old man Hatch. "What's he goin' to do with light'nin' up here?"

"O, goin' to light his buildin's 'n' run machinery round 'em with it. Goin' to clear up a ranch, I heer; think they want to stay here forever sence they seen this spring 'n' rock. That 'n', that wild man that's down there now in the woods roastin' hog, I heerd 'im tell Riley he wanted to be buried right here beside this big rock."

"Might spile the spring water," said Hatch; but the words had not left his tongue before a shout from Crab-apple Jones routed them out of their quarters and sent them hobbling for places of safety.

"Git off o' that plate there, you two old gossips, 'n' back where you won't git killed," was what he shouted at them. Crab-apple that day was carrying as a side-line a large red-ripe early-rose boil on his neck and was apt to let it spoil his usual good nature. "Last plate, boys," he had no sooner called than hands were after it with pikes.

"He-O-Heave! He-O-Heave!"

After it left the skids, up it rose, the end where

Snowdon was lifting always higher as had been the case all day, though Hannibal Hayhow, the all-powerful of Sal King township, with a chosen coterie, had elected to take the opposite end. Snowdon's unboasted strength had caused a growing admiration, for as the forenoon wore on it seemed only to increase as he warmed up to the task. They were beginning to regard him as a superman and with reason, for when he settled himself under this last timber for the final hoist, he displayed a strength like that of the aurochs.

"He-O-Heave! Let up a little, Snowdon," yelled Jones with no slight apprehension, "or you'll throw the hull weight back down onto them at 'tother end. He-O-Heave, Hayhow gang! Up with your end now,"—and the plate rested on top of the wall, followed by cheers from part of the crowd only, for the Hayhow faction had been outdone in a match secretly planned by themselves.

To be strenuous in the woods is to be king, and the cup of strength had been wrested that day from the erstwhile champion and passed over to an unsuspecting winner. But it carried a sting in it, a desire for revenge.

After the final lift, James stepped upon a block to face the throng. When the cheers had subsided sufficiently he said: "Gentlemen, the work you have done here to-day is much appreciated. I will settle for it after dinner. We will now go down into Egypt for corn—to the camp I mean and——"

"Git off'n my coat will ye!" broke in a shout from Crab-apple to the two old refugees who, comfortably camped on that garment, were interestedly listening to Jim. After they had made their second scramble that day from the trenchant voice of the irritable boil-ridden master of ceremonies, old man Carter at a safe distance grumbled: "I've seen the day I c'd whup 'im blind."

James, not a little annoyed at the treatment the old men had received, proceeded:—"and perhaps find something filling. I invite all; those who worked and those who came to pay me a visit. I appreciate visitors, too. This afternoon, as many as can stay to help with the roof, I would like your assistance."

This simple speech was the cause of wilder cheers.

Some one who had caught the name "Baron of the Barrens," from Cad in some of his erratic speeches, now suggested that title, which was lustily given, a name James often bore after that gala day at the Hermit Spring—a day thoroughly enjoyed and long remembered by his homely neighbors. For him their friendship now was sealed, exclusive of Hannibal Hayhow.

Now began a hustle for the camp. For the camp site, James had selected a sequestered glade in a hemlock thicket of low growth near the brook. Here they had pitched their tent and, sheltered from the winds by the green curtain of boughs all about, they found it an ideal lodge for the out-of-door life of which they were equally fond. With the tent-walls pinned tight to the ground, the canvas door-flap drawn, a crackling hickory-wood fire in the sheet-iron stove, an oil lamp hanging from the lodge pole, the place was snug even though the nights were growing cold. At first they had seriously thought of trying the tent for the winter but finally decided it would be too close a hug with nature on a zero morning.

In the center of the glade, a fire had been lighted in the morning. A professional colored chef from Petrolia, supported by Cadmus Allen, had been broiling, roasting, smoking, burning meat, coffee and potatoes over blaze and coals all the forenoon. Cadmus for his part when he was not carrying wood was usually burning his fingers and rubbing his eyes from smoke, injuries which he accepted very cheerfully, however. The shoat had been roasted in a large sheet-iron pan with cover; the potatoes, in a pit covered with hot coals; and the coffee was continually kept just at a seething heat in the large boiler. Such was the process of the feast. But the reprehensible Allen and the ebony chef had early fallen out when Cad had recommended Doan's pills to improve the complexion. Thus they were at logger-heads and the chef looked in a rather ugly mood when Jim came running up to him with orders for the serving arrangement.

"Say, boss," he began, "say, boss, yo'all done got a good man heah to help cook. Say, boss, he suah am.

Wuked hissself mos' blind dis mawnin'. Wuked hissself powahful hahd, boss, powahful hahd."

This drew the attention of the crowd and silence fell. Jim looked annoyed. He scented mischief.

"Wuked powahful hahd, boss," continued the colored gentleman.

"What at?" ventured Jim.

"Done nuffin but roast pig tail on de coals an' eat it, boss. Powahful much help, dat gem'man."

None laughed longer or louder than Cad and the erstwhile offended negro, believing that he was more than even now, was a continual burst of brays as he shuffled around, aproned and capped, filling trays with the palatable fare. Seated in a circle on the ground around the dying embers of the great camp-fire, the builders cracked their jokes and laughed their loudest as their plates were heaped with juicy meat and browned potatoes covered over with rich brown gravy. The glade was a babble of voices. The sun cast a mellow glow down into the opening and they revelled in ease and warmth.

Old Hatch was first to catch attention from the entire circle. Keeping his wisp of chin whiskers in perpetual bob, he said with a touch of pathos, "Only I wuz a boy agin!" And James then quoted the first verse of "The Boys" by merry old Dr. Holmes.

"That air's a perty good rhyme," praised old man Carter, taking a deep draught of coffee. "Wonder why Milt Cobb ain't to school to-day? He's never out when they's anything promised to eat."

James had wondered often, too, that day why he was not there. Milt claimed to have been a wheel-wright in his time and thus it had been on the strength of what he proposed to do with a water power at the Hermit Spring that James had engaged him to install a works. He was to have been there that morning.

"I crossed 'is fields this mornin' on my way over here an' I seen 'im goin' down the road afoot toward Petrolia, all sails to the breeze. Went as though he was goin' to or runin' from a fire. Likely Aunt Ibbey came off the nest cross this mornin' an' put 'im on the wing after some-



thin’,” came a voice from the opposite side of the ring.

A snapping of dry twigs from beyond a spot where the hemlocks grew thickest around the enclosure now drew attention. After listening a moment, when the sound was not repeated, they resumed the talk and feasting.

“Milt’s queer; but if ye are in need of a friend in deviltry I’ve found he’s right on the job an’ a stayer,” chimed in Crab-apple Jones.

The snapping was repeated. They listened again.

“Likely some dog,” accounted Riley Henshaw.

Barely had he uttered the words when from the dense copse crashed something, the first sight of which struck terror to the boldest heart there that day. They sat motionless as if petrified. Straight for the darkey who was sitting apart amidst the pans and pots ran a dread figure, wrapped in a fiery red blanket reaching below the knees. The head was feather-covered but for a strip across the eyes; for ears there were wings. A shriek such as is possible only to the black race escaped that negro as he somersaulted backward and, by some caper not designed, lit upon his feet. Another bound and he was clear from sight, from hearing, as if he were not and never had been. The strange creature stopped at the point where the negro had started and shed its blanket. Then off came the gruesome head-gear, and what stood there was just the harmless Cadmus Allen.

Jim Snowdon was on his feet that instant. So rapid had been the farce that not a muscle had moved in the ring till now. He was visibly angry. Eyes that never had looked anything but affection for Allen before, now fairly blazed. Had Cad gone a step too far? It was now dawning upon him that he had. He stood returning Snowdon’s furious gaze with an attempted smile. Neither spoke. Yet Cad saw that Jim was struggling to gain mastery over a sudden gust of temper—something unusual for him to give way to.

“Aw, that wasn’t nawthin’!” came a boy’s voice, some champion for the thoughtless Cad.

It proved the key to Snowdon’s voice and guttrally deep he asked: “Cad—why did—you do that?”

"To help the coon make quick time back to Petrolia, Jim. Weren't you through with him yet? I can wash the dishes."

The tension now relaxed and the crowd became a rolling, tumbling mass of howls and screams of laughter as they recalled the flip-flop of the darkey.

"Where'd you git the feathers?" "When did you fix 'em?" "Where'd you git the blanket?" were questions that came between bursts of ecstatic delight.

Jim stood quietly by till the noise died down somewhat before he spoke again.

"Don't suppose it's of any use to call after him and try to get him back," he said, turning to Riley Henshaw.

"Call 'im! He's in Petrolia by this time, a pern 'n' all!" And Riley doubled in convulsions again.

"Bet he'll be troubled some with hoarseness to-morrer," said old Carter.

"He'll be stiff-jinted fer life," reckoned old man Hatch.

"He turned white I bet at the sight," commented Fox Trot Bentley.

"There his coat and hat hang in the bunk-tent. Cad Allen, you are the man that'll go to Petrolia and settle with him for this farrago job," said Snowdon, deeply deploring the occasion.

"Jim, you never can get within ten miles of him if he knows it," answered Cad. "He'll think us and our money hoodooed. No, you can never settle with Rasmus Green. He kept telling me all morning you'd pay the fiddler for your grand soiree; that he intended to charge you just double for coming out here in the woods and cooking for these cannibals. I shot an owl the other day behind the tent and left it there. I slipped an old thin sack out there this morning and times, when I wasn't carrying wood, I cut out a head piece, sewed it up, picked the owl and stuck in the feathers. The blanket I took from our bed-cot. When you began eating, I disappeared into the tent, got the blanket, crept out under the canvas and into the bush. You all know the rest. Rasmus won't soak you double now, Jim."

"No, I think his rates will be ruther reasonable," commented Salt Purdy.

"Well, let us finish dinner if Cad can behave long enough to let it go on," said Jim, dropping down again.

"Now the cannibal is gone 'n' mebbly he won't take us down on top o' that ham he was devourin'. Mebbly good thing the exhibition was pulled off," said Crab-apple Jones, as they resumed the feast.

By evening the roof of the cabin was nearly completed. And when the last of the workers departed at nightfall for their homes, they unanimously voted the new neighbors capital employers and entertainers, Cadmus as usual furnishing the thrills of the day.

## VIII

### HOME

Home. A genuine Saxon word! It is the foundation stone of all the languages spoken by mankind. Be its import but a memory of a sand-blown tent in the mind of the wandering nomad of the desert it endures and wakens the same endearment that the buttressed castle stirs in the heart of the exiled noble. Speak the word to the criminal in his cell on the eve of execution and witness his agony of remorse. Speak it to the wanderer, the wayward, the outcast and note the anguish that undying memory brings back afresh.

What did the word waken in Jim Snowdon's mind as Cad uttered it? Jim, seated on the cot in the tent, was softly twanging the strings of a guitar on the evening of the cabin-raising at Hermit Spring. In the little sheet-iron stove, pine-knots were crackling and blazing in the light of an oil lamp hanging from the tent-top. Cad lounged on a blanket down by the fire, listening to the melody that Jim hummed to the accompaniment of the instrument.

"Sing a song of home, of Scotland."

At the word "home," Jim was back in his own beloved country. He saw once more the clachan in the glen where the bagpipes still shrilled by the loch; where the four ways met at the auld licht kirk, the spire a lodestone for reverent thought, the kirk-yard where the granite cruelly marked the place of—he groaned.

Cad lifted his head suddenly at the sound. The features of his friend were painfully changed. Cad, realizing he had awakened some bitter memory, cried out in remorse: "Oh, Jim, old boy, I didn't mean to——"

"You asked me to sing," and Jim plucked the strings again and sang:

“ ‘By yon bonnie banks, an’ by yon bonnie braes,  
 Where the sun shines bright on Loch Lomon’,  
 Where me an’ my true love were ever wont to gae,  
 On the bonnie, bonnie banks o’ Loch Lomon’.

‘Oh, ye’ll tak’ the high-road an’ I’ll tak’ the low-road,  
 An’ I’ll be in Scotland afore ye,  
 But me an’ my true love will never meet again,  
 On the bonnie, bonnie banks o’ Loch Lomon.’ ”

Cad understood: Jim was singing a heart-broken truth. At times Cad’s nature was extremely emotional. He rose and went to the door where he stood looking out into the gloom. Deeply as he regretted the pain he had caused, an irresistible sympathy impelled him to speak further.

“Why, never meet again?”

The answer came steadily with a pathos such as only simplicity can give: “A farewell ow’re her casket in the kirk-yard I was forced tae gie tae meet nae mair.”

Cad had never heard him speak in his native dialect before. As he turned Jim gave a sob, and turned over on the cot. Cad walked back to where he was lying. At the tender touch of the boy’s hand, the older man grew quieter. Cad began a cheerful, if forced, talk of the present, with good effect, for soon the old-time composure was restored.

“Say, Jim,” began Cad in his usual vein, for trouble was incompatible with his buoyant nature, “Say, Jim, we were to set a trap to-night, don’t you remember, at the pond to catch that coon that’s after the trout Milt brought you to stock it with? Don’t you think you can breast the world again and outgeneral that coon? Come on now. Rise, go forth into the moonlight. The night is perfect and calling us. Come.”

“Cad! Does the old home never call you back? Do you never see faces you will never see again? A mother, Cad, that——”

“Oh, it’s the miserables again! Home! Yes, I had one, but I beat it soon as I got big enough to turn grindstone. Out of this bunk now! Shake your lazy limbs!

Break away. Must have caught it from Jerushy Henshaw. Brought me to this owl's roost up here for health and happiness and now make it as dismal as you can. I'll throw some coals onto the bed, if you don't move, and fire you out."

Cad pulled down two heavy woolen sweaters from the tent-pole, for the night was frosty. Then he procured a steel trap from under the cot, a slice of bacon from the provision box, and they were ready.

Moonlight in the hills—a soft shimmer through the trees upon the deep blanket of leaves. As Jim swung along over the crackling path men would have envied his robust figure and women would have looked twice and, oftener perhaps, were there a sly opportunity. Behind came Cad and he, too, was good to look upon, "light of heart and fancy free." As they neared the pond where the woods opened, they paused enraptured. The moon had turned the waters to molten silver and the birches bordering the rim spread their boughs over a sheet of phantom water.

"Tell you, Cad, what I am going to do next spring. See those two knolls over on the other side? There's a deep sink beyond them. A channel can be made to let water from this lake into that hollow. Then, we'll fix a dam to keep that second lake filled. It will be an ideal place for water plants. They require warm, stagnant water (Cad held his nose) and muck bottom in which to root to make them thrive and bloom. I'll get corms of the white water-lily, start them in tubs, then settle them in their new home and border it all with rushes, wake-robin, for-get-me-nots, gentian and whatever loves the damp. When the pool is covered with those waxen white lily blooms, Cad——"

"When the pool is filled with those bloomin' bullfrogs, Jim——"

"When you see the lilies in daytime, Cad, you will whistle and never think of frogs," laughed Jim.

"When you hear the frogs in the night-time, Jim, you will curse and never think of lilies," returned Cad.

"Cad," began Jim with some deliberation, "Cad, I've

diagnosed your case and I have arrived at an ultimate conclusion."

"Well, Doctor, what is the nature of the pest? Is it ketchin'?" laughed the irrepressible.

"You are a confirmed cynic."

"Glad I'm not a leper," rejoiced Cad. "What is a cynic?"

"In common parlance, you are the off-ox. Opposition is your creed."

At that Cadmus vigorously began fanning himself with his cap while he puffed and blew. "That's a hot one, Doctor. You don't think I'll live to reach the tent again, do you? Lucky I haven't a touch of heart disease. I'd have fallen over dead when you stated my case. You draw your conclusion from my opposing your project of fitting up a fever hole here in this Eveless Eden to fill up with bull frogs to croak till nothing sleeps here in these woods. I was raised on the edge of a frog-pond and I know their quality. They are like you. They are always saddest when they sing."

With difficulty Jim avoided laughing at the satire.

"You are as easy to convince as a dervish. Come, let's look at the cabin, and Big Ben in the moonlight. How like Scotland this spot could be. If there were crags and peaks it would carry me back."

"Now you are heading straight for another fit, Jim. Just hold it off till we set the trap to catch the coon that is prowling here nights to catch your fish, the only live creatures you possess. Then, if I had dynamite, I'd blow that big rock to kingdom come, burn the cabin, dry up the spring and turn you back to civilization. I didn't take you seriously at first, but now I am blest if I don't believe you are bent on anchoring down here to mull your life away."

"With you, Cad, how could I ever grow lonely here, you old bundle of unexpected changes. Yes, here we live, oil or no oil. Above Big Ben that level country can be converted into a wonderful farm. These hills when partially cleared will be a natural grazing place for sheep. Like Job in the land of Uz we will foster herds and flocks and

be of use in the world helping furnish the sustenance of man. I like old Job, the farmer, best of all the Old Testament characters. He was progressive, patient, upright in the sight of the Lord and his house clean of scandal. There are many possibilities of promise in these old rock-ribbed hills and, quoting old Milt,

“ ‘There’s many a rose in the path of life,  
If we would but stop to pluck it.’ ”

To which Cad quickly subjoined :

“ ‘There are two thorns for every rose,  
Be careful how you snatch it.’ ”

“Do you want me to become a hermit or a monk; dry up here an old bachelor in these hills (he was fastening the chain of the trap to the roots of a sapling)? Don’t think that kind of a life appeals to my taste (spreading the trap and fastening the key under the pan). I haven’t quarreled with you long enough to quit for awhile (pushing into the ground a stick with a forked top and fastening the bacon); but don’t bank too much on my staying up in this roost to die single (raking light mould and leaves over the chain and trap to thwart man-made scent and to obscure it). There, Racoon, is allurements.”

“Living up here will not necessarily be prohibitive of matrimony,” alleged Jim, starting back for the tent.

“Who worth having would come into this howling wilderness, forty miles from nowhere?”

“She is waiting. The fairies will show her to you in their own good time. You may find her in a bower of bloom on the margin of the pool, hidden in the lilies that are to blossom there. Wait.”

When they re-entered the tent, Cad replenished the fire. Rolled in their cozy blankets, they did not sleep at first, but lay for a time listening to the voices of the night. An owl hooted to his mate.



“His hoot on the hill  
Sends water to milk,”

said James. “We must hurry that cabin and the oil rig while this good weather lasts. It may bother us to get that water wheel installed, though I much doubt if it can be made practical for drilling, and the outfit brought up here before the weather breaks. I expected Milt here today to begin on the wheel.”

“He is to bring me a pup, a collie, when he comes,” returned Cad sleepily, more interested in a dog than in an oil well.

The pert bark of a fox came from the opposite hill-side and the tremulo of a screech-owl from a tree near by.

“When I get a dog and gun there’ll be a holocaust in these woods ’round here,” murmured Cad and Jim knew then how to keep him.

Then the whinny of a coon from somewhere above the cabin advised them of his approach for fish and bacon. A porcupine gnawed with saw-filing sound on a dead hemlock and Cadmus closed his heavy eye-lids to dream of a dog and gun.

## IX

### HEATHER FROM THE BRAES

Cad was up next morning long before the day began. A fire that would have warmed the out-of-doors was soon roaring in the stove. Jim, roused by the brisk stir around him, lay watching the preparations for an early breakfast. It was as yet intensely dark and quiet save for the dropping of leaves. The fur and feathered tribe had had their concert and had sought their hiding places as day brought dangers. In fine fettle worked the cook. He boiled water for the coffee and the cereal, fried sliced potatoes and warmed meat left from the barbecue; and when he had the batter stirred for the cakes, made from "Aunt Jinny's Ready Pancake Flour," a peep outside convinced him that day was dawning.

"Jim, there is a budding chance for you this morning to practice flopping dodgers while I run up to the trap and see what the catch has been,"—as he hustled on a sweater and cap. "Lend me your revolver?"

"Sure," replied Jim, springing out of bed and hurrying into his clothes. "Afraid I'll spoil your cakes. Feel like I could eat my weight. Growing hungrier every minute."

"Keep stirring the cereal. Don't let it burn! I'll drag in a bear."

Before long a report from the gun apprised Jim that the trapper had not been disappointed. He now poured batter onto the griddle, assured his cakes would be a success, stirred the cereal and made more cakes. The hunter seemed slow in returning. Down the path he finally came, heralded by a scent stout enough to smother all in the woods.

"Don't you dare to come in here," shouted Jim in desperation; "you'll ruin this breakfast."

"I'm O. K., Jim. Like the flower that is born to blush unseen, I'm happy to tell you most of the fragrance was

wasted on the desert air. Bring me out some clothes and I'll hang these on the bushes to air. It's a pure black and its hide is worth ten dollars. Say, we'll make a mint of money here in these hills this winter. Don't care if we never see a drop of oil, do you? Wow! but won't I have a time trapping and hunting! My dog may be here today! What's that?"

They stopped eating to listen. A voice was lifted in song, the words clearly audible through the clear morning air:

“‘David had a banjo ’n’ he kep’ it strung,  
’N’ he ’ranged the music accordin’;  
’N’ he played a tune called: ‘Go it while yer young,’  
’N’ they danced it on the other side o’ Jordan.’”

“Old Milt!” cried Cad, jubilant. “Oh, say, man, we are beginning a large day. Everything will be doing.”

“‘David an’ Goliah walked out to take a game,  
David said Goliah was a cheatin’;  
David held the ace while Goliah held the spades  
’N’ the trump was on the other side o’ Jordan.

‘David ’n’ Goliah walked out to take a fight,  
Old father Warner went out to part ’em,  
David up with a stone, hit Goliah on the shin,  
’N’ it bounded on the other side o’ Jordan.

‘The elephant ’n’ flea went down to the brook,  
The flea got a plank for to cross on;  
The elephant sunk in plump up to his knees,  
’N’ it sounded on the other side o’ Jordan.’

“Hey, you bushwhackers!” as old Milt thrust his wrinkled countenance ruddy with the morning crispness in at the door. “What you been takin’ for your breaths, this morning’?”

“Come in, come in,” chorused the pair.

“Milt, where is my dog?”

“Here, Lark! Come, Lark!” and through the curtained

door bounded a half-grown collie of good pedigree, judged by the glossy coat with its patches of black and white. Knowingly he placed his fore-paws upon Cad's leg and barked, to be rewarded by a bone. Stroking the sleek coat of the animal, the delighted master addressed him in a language dogs might have understood, now oblivious of other companions.

"Come, Mr. Cobb, and have some coffee," said James who had been arranging a place for him at the box-table. "We've plenty of breakfast for 'all including Cad's crony. After your long walk you must be very hungry again."

"I won't need to be coaxed eny. I was off my perch airly this mornin'; I'd a come over——"

"Where'd you get the purp?" cut in Cad.

"Never you mind where I got the dog. Children mus'n't ask too many questions. As I was sayin', I'd a come last night, then I'd a been better fer a big day's work but I couldn't git any one to stay with Ibbey. Don't know what that old womern is comin' to any way. When I got back from Petrolia yisterday, found her locked up in the house scairt ready to fly the coop. Vowed 'n' declared she'd seen a nigger crossin' the fields 'n' 'cordin' to her tell, he must a been goin' hell bent for 'lection. Says he was dressed in white 'n' she takes it as a sure sign she'll be a corpse in less 'n' a week. I combed the Ridge last night to see if any one else had seen one round 'n' nobody else had heerd or seen any. But some o' the men that had jest got home from here would do nothin' but snicker 'n' laf when I'd talk of it. Wonder if they thought Ibbey was romancin'?"

"Maybe it was the Hillside-Mooney dolled up in a new fall costume," hinted Cad.

Burning on a quick draught of the coffee he took to hide his feelings, wide open flew Milt's mouth!

"Didn't hold it long 'nough, to scald bad," he replied to Jim's question. "'Twan't jest table etiket but I've too many uses for my mouth to boil it out at the table. Coffee must have been some'rs near a fire by the taste. Yes, thanky, I'll have another cake."

"Milt, you missed more fun yesterday than a box of

snakes by not attending the frolic. How could you chain yourself tight enough to keep away?"

"Fun? Jacob's cattle! So long sense I've had eny I'm 'fraid it might give me hiccups. I had to gird up my loins and make a journey unto Petrolia. I nurse a mor'gage that crawls into bed with me nights 'n' crawls out with me mornin's. They're mighty unpleasant bed-fellers let me tell ye if ye never harbored one. This time it had kep' Ibbey from snorin' 'n' I just had to go down 'n' see if I c'd git it poulticed to keep it from eatin' deeper. That's why my corporal porosity was not at the bee."

He was silent a moment. Sympathy for his financial straits led Jim to inquire who held the mortgage.

"Your esteemed uncle o' course. They hain't eny trouble goin' 'thout him in it. He's allus lookin' out fer his pound o' flesh," answered Milt, carrying half a pancake to his mouth on his knife.

James grew thoughtful. "Is it a large debt and when is it due, Mr. Cobb?"

From the tone of voice, Milton began to feel there was a deeper interest manifested than mere curiosity would excite. He gave the amount of the obligation, the time it was overdue, adding that John Snowdon had secured it with no other purpose than to hold him cornered.

Jim quickly surmised that the present value of the property was worth more than the debt. It was worth saving.

"Does he wish to foreclose?" he inquired.

"Ain't feverish to do it sence yisterday's debate. Yes, thanky, I'll take another cake."

Jim was silent for a moment.

"Well, let him do it, Mr. Cobb. Quicker the better. If he does, we will shift the debt into more tolerant hands. Arrange it so that you can remain in your home, you know."

Old Milt could hardly refrain from giving Jim a bear-hug. From his troubled mind such a weight had been so suddenly lifted that he gave one resounding war-whoop instead of words of thanks, and capered about the tent with the lightness of youth.

"Wal," he began as he seated himself on a keg by the

stove at the finish of avowedly the best meal he had eaten since the days of fire-places, "the real news, the latest sensation, is yit to come, Jim. Wouldn't wonder but Petrolia got a shakin' up last night that set her to quakin' bad's Charlestown the time o' the earthquake down there.

"When I left the office yisterday of Snowdon and Son." Milt resumed as he raked a coal from the fire to light his pipe, "I hadn't more'n cleared the door till some one called me by name. 'Twas a female voice 'n' I thought the pertiest I ever had heerd. Wal, who should come steppin' up but a girl with a face like a rose-bud. She begun to inquire about ye right off, said ye had been a good true friend o' hern 'n' a heap more things about ye. She is typewriter to your Uncle John. Said her name was Jane MaCracken——"

"Jean MacCrea!" exclaimed Jim, his face radiant at the news while Cad sat up to listen, neglecting his dog.

"Wal, Jane MacCray, then," Milt continued. "She'd heerd ye was my neighbor and wanted to heer of ye but 'twan't no good place there to gas so we dropped down the cultivator together so swift I felt for my hat when we landed, thinkin' I'd parted from it above. But 'twas on as before. Wal, when we got out in the hall, she seemed to be in a hurry to git away; kep' lookin' for some one. I s'pose I looked awful em'ty to her—'twas noon 'n' I was eight miles from home 'n' not a cent in my pockets. She lookd sad 'n' anxious like but still kep' smilin'. Wal, she hit on the idee to take me to dinner 'n' there we could talk. Wanted to send a little box to ye, too. I hated to let her pay for the grub, still I was hungrier than I was this mornin' so I wan't hard to coax and we dropped in at the Arlin'ton calf—somethin'."

Here he paused in his narrative and from an inner coat pocket drew forth a small box neatly wrapped in white paper and handed it to Snowdon. "She didn't know exactly where ye got yer mail 'n' so used me to insure safe 'n' swift delivery," he said, proud of her confidence.

James opened the box with eager hands. On the top there lay a note; beneath, wrapped in dainty tissue-paper, was the heather. Carefully he unfolded the precious gift.

Though somewhat dried, the pink shades of the flowers were yet wonderfully bright, the green of the leaves but slightly changed—the piney texture of the plant rendering it slow to wither and fade. Pleasant memories of his native heath clung around this token. It brought before him afresh the time of year when the moors and braes were pink with its bloom. But he passed it over quickly for Cad to examine while he read the note. It read:

“My dear friend James:

“I hear you have returned and are now in the hills. You will be surprised to know I am in your uncle’s employ. After my aunt died, I came to Petrolia in answer to his ‘ad’ for a stenographer, thinking he might be like you and I might find a friend again. You can guess my disappointment! I don’t wonder at the estrangement between you; that you left for the West. They have a hold on you, Jim—on the Barrens. They already have spies in the hills.

“Is this espionage work, while in their employ, dishonorable? It can’t be when they strike at you. I feel I never can repay the debt I owe you.

“I received a box of heather from home quite recently and I am dividing it.

“Ever your sincere friend,

“Jean MacCrea.”

“Bonnie Jean! I’ll not forsake you in time of trouble—never.” James folded the note and slipped it into an inner pocket of his blouse.

“How old’s this Jane McCracken, er Jane McCrane, I should say?”

“Oh—guess about twenty-two. Jean is an orphan. When her mother died she was left homeless and penniless. Her only near relative was an aunt here in America. It was then I was ready to come to this country and I brought her with me to her friends. They were poor but they gladly took her in and we—they—helped her through school. But, tell me about the dinner at the Arlington before we go to work.”

The old man made a fantastic but convincing tale of the impromptu vaudeville. His concern for Jean was real.

At the end of the recital Jim rose quickly. "You say the last you saw of Jean, she disappeared down an alley."

Milt nodded.

"Cad," said James, turning to Allen, "I am going to Petrolia. Riley is coming round by way of Comfort with his car this morning. I'll hire it or hire him to take me. Want to go along?"

"Think I might be of any use?"

"Might. I'll leave orders with Riley, if he doesn't go, how to engineer matters till we return. Mr. Cobb, you may go on with your work as understood. The water wheel will not be practical for drilling but a cheap power for other purposes, so go ahead. Let's fix up a bit, Cad. Must not dress beyond our means of course but we sure look frowsy."

"Wild men from the burnt woods is how the papers will feature us, best we can do. Sweaters are our only wardrobe now. They are quick and cover a multitude of dirt," returned Cad, suiting the action to the word.

"What about dinner?" Old Milt woefully overburdened was yet fearing for dinner.

"Be back before that time, likely, that is if we succeed in booking you for a season's run in opera," answered Cad, tossing Jim a comb. "If we're not back by that time, you may look for us in the morgue."

"Hey, fellers!" called Milt after them. "Anything in pertickler ye would have me do in the way o' chores fer ye here to-day?"

"Yes," answered Cad, "manicure the dog's nails and don't forget to water the trout at noon."

Before Milt reached the clearing, he heard voices and hammering around the cabin. Already men were there at work. As he came upon the scene of activity with dog and adz, he was early accosted by Riley Henshaw:

"Wonder what's the matter with Snowdon this morning? He acted like a reg'lar demon. What's he gone tearin' off like this for?"

"Dunno," replied Milt affecting ignorance of the purpose. "Unless it's to take that crazy Allen to some surgeon 'n' have his head bored for the simples."



## X

### WHEREIN JEAN PRACTICES ELUSION

Macaroni Alley cuts down from Main Street into the slum section of Petrolia along the water front. Here in the palmy days of the oil industry the city had been started. But since the river was prone to overflow its banks and flood the flats, the newer and better Petrolia had been founded on more elevated ground and the old locality was left to the poorer element, which now consisted largely of foreigners. Here, as in their native cities, the poor lived mainly in the streets. Between the narrow sidewalks stands laden with fish and oils, fruit and nuts from distant countries were tended by dark-skinned men and women gaudily dressed and decked with showy jewelry, suggestive of a midway at a fair.

Jean could pass through Macaroni Alley and come out upon King Street not far from her boarding place with slight chances of meeting any one who had witnessed the involuntary show at the Arlington. So down she plunged somewhat surprised to find it some sort of holiday with the populace and the place trimmed with tawdry bunting and all heyday. Grind-organs, accordians, tambourines, castanets, squawkers, whistles, wattles, bones, with jibber and song deafened her with their discordance. As she crowded through the groups they ceased their chatter and darkly frowned. Her manner and attire proved her alien, and provoked hostility. Perhaps a social worker. They were averse to being cleaned up. Now they indulged in hoarse laughter which attracted attention from a knot of men who leered at her as she approached them. Murders, robberies, abductions—all the horrible tragedies of which she had ever read or heard, now floated before her swimming vision. Retreat was cut off.

“Mootcha fine Americano leddy,” said one unsteady brute advancing toward her.

Before she could turn to flee she slipped on something

that sent her sprawling at his feet. Screams of laughter from the gathering crowd followed the act, but above their cries rose Jean's scream. Her tormenters scattered and scurried for cover. A policeman's whistle had answered her cry of distress. She lay there a crumpled heap when a moment later a large hand raised her to a sitting posture. Nearly fainting she looked up into a kindly face.

"Are yez kilt, little girrul?" asked the great voice of big Mike Donovan, the man of terror for Macaroni Alley.

"No; I think I was just stunned," she answered, feebly endeavoring to rise.

He lifted her up and seated her on an empty box that stood on the side of the walk; then stepped back and confronted her.

"Now tell me what the divil—plaze excuse my French—iver could bring yez into this place and alone?"

She hesitated a moment before answering. "It was an accident. I am here by mistake," she faltered and her lips began to tremble as she touched her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Now, don't cry, little girrul, don't cry," he said as if regretting his brusque question. "Accidents will happen even to the cats an' they're the carefulest av animals." Then, noticing the faint smile at his homily, "It's a sayin' in the owld country, they'll go to Hong Kong for fish an' niver wet their paws. Well, where does yez b'long? Or where does yez want to go?"

"King Street," she replied rising. "But I am afraid to go on alone."

"Well, I'll walk back there wid yez," and he gave her his arm.

"Niver yez coome in here again, me little girrul. Oi take me loife in me hands, Oi know sometimes when Oi walk this alley. There are good pable here as ev'ry where else but more bad wans. Well, here yez air at King Street an' now good-boi an' sthay yez iver after this out of here."

He turned again after her many thanks to call back, "If iver yez git in a pinch, little girrul, jist hurry a call foor Moike Donovan." And he stood and watched her till she entered the little suburban store across the street.

“If that don’t bate the Dutch, an’ they do bate the divil! Whatever took that swate little girrul into the loikes o’ that place alone. She’s oiyes loike th’ dew-kissed voiolets an’ cheeks loike the Killarney roses an’ hair that on’y the fairies could give it that tooch av gold. An’ here Moike Donovan isn’t married yit aither.”

In the store, Jean purchased a pair of colored glasses and a box of white face powder. With the large spectacles hiding her eyes and shadowing her face as much as possible with her hat she hurried out again and along the street. A short distance east brought her to a small neat cottage with a tiny lawn and a rear garden. When she had gained the door and closed it after her, she fairly flew up the stairs to her little room.

But Jean was far from friendless in the city. From below at this moment came a crooning voice, “Jean, Jean lassie, will ye nae coom tae yeer deener till it’s owre cauld? Coom doon, noo, lassie. A’m waitin’ masel’ tae eat wi’ ye.”

No answer came from above, for things were happening in lively fashion in Jean MacCrea’s room. Presently the possessor of the voice, the motherly Mrs. MacIntyre, came to the bottom of the stairs and called again.

“Jean, lassie, will ye nae coom doon? The clock is chapin th’ half oor ayant one. Are ye seek that ye dinna answer me, chiel?”

“Coming right now, Mrs. MacIntyre,” came the answer, a moment later followed by Jean.

Not with her usual light trip-step did she descend the stairs, but slowly as if a burden were bearing heavily upon her shoulders. Up went Mrs. MacIntyre’s hands, her eyes to the ceiling, at the sight of the unbelievable costume in which the lass had decked herself: “Oonder God, Jean MacCrea, what’s bent yeer heid this day tae becom a gypsy?” Then her hands fell and her eyes in perplexity sought the girl’s face. “It passes me that wi’ a’ the grace ye’ve had before that at this oor ye’d tak’ th’ notion tae gae abroad in a gear that wad stamp ye a dowdy fair. Ye’er nae past a mither’s care yit an’ wad tae God ye haad a mither. Ye’ll nae hear tae me I’m fearin’.

Can ye eat i' that yoke? Will ye nae coom tae the table before ye gae oot agin for th' burlesque?"

Here was a case that tested Auntie MacIntyre's philosophy. In a confidential talk with her one day, Jean had imparted the intelligence that unless young Snowdon ceased his annoying attentions, she would be driven to quit his employ. Auntie had suggested that plainer dress might cool his warm affection. She had said that it was ever thus with men: "Fine feathers make fine birds." Jean felt that it simply would be hopeless to attempt to explain the purpose of the garb in which she was now faring forth. The escapade at the Arlington would never be countenanced by the dignified Mrs. MacIntyre. The old lady's radical sense of propriety, she was the personification of modesty and circumspection, would receive such a jolt that Jean was positive it would mean the parting of the ways. Mrs. MacIntyre's roof would never cover scandal. Now the guise she had assumed was simply the fashion of several years ago. The frock had been resurrected from the depths of her wardrobe where by chance it had escaped the charity collections. From an old hat she had snipped all the trimming save black ribbon and braid.

"Yeer hat, Jean, is maist like th' ones I've seen in th' queer peectures o' Mither Goose," said Mrs. MacIntyre in despair.

"I've had dinner, Auntie," Jean found voice at length to answer. "I should have told you that when I came in. I'm sorry for my thoughtlessness. You, you don't think, then, Mr. Snowdon will worship me in this outfit?" she added mischievously.

"If ye've set oot, Jean, tae blast his love, ye'll succeed ayant my maist amazed expectations, maark my words."

"Well, good-bye, Auntie MacIntyre. I'll be back to tea early if I can."

"A'm doubtful, Jean, if ye coom hame th' nicht. Wi' that deathly color in yeer face, th' ord'nance is maist certain tae tak' ye oop an' awa' tae th' hospectral. Nae corpse can be mair ghaist like. An' th' goggles tae th' outfit! Jean, gin ye waur dressin' tae turn his affections, A' see nae reason for yeer makin' it oop lak' th' Witch o' Eendor,"

were the parting words of prim Mrs. MacIntyre as she turned to clear the dinner away, worry and dismay written in every line of her features.

Jean was late. Punctuality had always been a creed with her. On the rare occasions when she had been tardy she had been met with a frown from the older man counteracted by a tolerant smile from the younger. To-day would tax valiant youth for a smirk. Short of breath, she was hurrying to the office of Snowdon and Son, goggles and Mother Goose hat defeating any admiring searchers for Miss Cloverbloom. No gaping on the streets in cities at back numbers. No one noticed her she felt quite sure. When she entered the office Snowdon, Sr. looked up from a letter he was reading and his lower jaw sagged. The junior member of the firm regarded her as if she were of as small importance as a fly on the wall, then pulled out his watch very concernedly. "I wonder what keeps Jean." After she had marched across the floor between them, removed her hat and glasses and changed her seat and table to face the window, she looked back. They were both standing. The municipal head of Petrolia looked cheap. The son, so to speak, was disappointedly glancing into a casket that held the remains of Jean MacCrea. Mrs. MacIntyre's nostrum was proving an efficacious remedy though that estimable lady could never have administered it herself.

"Ready for dictation and waiting," said Jean, taking her seat.

Snowdon, Sr. sank into his chair and poured out a letter to her fast and furious. Jean expertly caught his chopping words. He would be slow to discharge her for her acumen often eclipsed his own in matters clerical.

Business was bustling now. Men interested in the formation of a proposed corporation were gathering around the senior member's table. Young John took a seat close to Jean. She did not look up, just kept her pencil ready. He had difficulty in clearing his throat before beginning. A pin now dropped to the floor, loosing a coil of her hair.

"Jean, what hair! It's shine is like the silk of Persia!"

"I'm sorry," she said in a tone of mock regret. "I would rather it shone like hair."

He nipped his lip at the mild sarcasm. Plainly John Jr. was again on the rack. He now believed that Jean had thus arrayed herself for his benefit solely to hurt his feelings. Flushes of anger and of love alternated. With all his reputed wealth and his position he would twist her around his finger in time. The masquerade might be only to test his love.

"Waiting,"—nervously tapping with her pencil.

"Jean, why this hellish outfit this afternoon?" he asked uncertainly.

"I had rather not discuss tactics of dress at this time. Waiting."

Now the telephone bell rang. As he answered, she caught his half of the conversation.

"Yes"—"Is this you, Mother?"—"Father is busy"—"You know he doesn't take much stock in Rube shows though"—"At the Arlington?"—"Miss Cloverbloom?"—"Haven't noticed the boards closely enough to give the name—think it's 'How Fuller Done the Town'"—"The Stuyvesant-Fisk-Parkins bunch is going?"—"All right. I'll coax Father"—"Well, perhaps I may go but not with that old hen—exclusive party I mean"—"All right. Good-bye."

When he had resumed his seat she had turned her back. He wondered at the change. What had changed her so abruptly? True, she had repulsed all his advances, but this sudden cold indifference was beyond his ken. Even in the outlandish garments she was beautiful. Not beauty of face alone did she possess but that more dangerous marvel of a faultless body, which held him breathless and compelled him to stare and to covet. Yet Jean Mac-Crea was filled with a resentment toward life, for beauty seemed only an asset to draw bids in an open market. She wondered sometimes if it were true of all men, this beauty lust. The answer was no. For there was Jim Snowdon. But they were only friends.

John, Jr. studied her covertly, insanely persistent, and grasped at an idea: "Jean, would you not like to attend

the play to-night at the Bijou? It promises to be better than ordinary?"

When the question was propounded, she was gazing at the far-off hills and wondering if they might not be the hills where Jim was living; and a longing came to her troubled mind for a quiet peace in the wilderness. How beautiful was the soft blue haze hanging over that land which seemed so far away and she wondered if it were the time of the gathering of the fruit when October holds in her bountiful hands the last of the harvest treasure.

She had heard his question but it bore such a sting that she did not answer. He repeated it presently.

"Yes," she answered in a mechanical voice.

He was wild. "I will come around promptly with the car at seven-thirty; a little joy ride and then the show, girly!"

"I did not tell you I was going," came the cold voice again.

"But won't you go, Jean?"

"And sit where your mother and sisters can see us?"

"Y-y-yes," he faltered.

"That was a time when a 'yes' meant 'no,' Mr. Snowdon." But before she could say more, there was a hub-bub around the head table and a general rising.

"Waiting," she said again to waken him to duty.

To John, Jr., "waiting" was the most abominable of words. There was something indefinitely elusory about the girl and it is that elusiveness, that uncertainty, that drives men to pursue. He sat twisting an expensive diamond that glinted on a finger of his left hand and meditated a moment before starting work again. He could bide his time.

The afternoon wore away with the usual routine of office work. If Jean had a moment of leisure, her eyes switched to the hills. If trouble came, would Jim come to the rescue as old Milt had promised, or would she be left alone? As the end of the round of grill and grind approached the evening paper came in. John, Jr. scanned it first.

"Quite a notice of the play tonight," he said, addressing

the older man who was busy shuffling over papers for filing, but indirectly addressing Jean. "Seems that some of the troupe advertised at the Arlington at dinner and made a big hit."

"What did you say the name of the thing is?" asked his father, annoyed at the thought that he was to be carried that night to a cheap play and bored for a couple of hours.

"'How Uncle Fuller Done the Town,'" was the response.

"Likely the gang will come in from Weatherbytown on a load of hay," snarled the elder.

At this point in the dialogue Jean, the gayety star for whose performance that day he was to be dragged to the play, passed her employer with the coldness of an iceberg and handed him a note. He watched her till she had closed the door behind her.

"Are you in any way responsible, John, for that girl's behavior this afternoon? She's been on my nerves ever since she returned from dinner. Has got the notion some way we're running a zoo and togged up accordingly. I don't like it."

"What has got into her is a mystery to me," returned the crestfallen John, Jr. "I don't know."

"O, maybe it's thunder or spiders or mice," bit off Snowdon, Sr. as he adjusted his glasses to see what the note disclosed. "By the gods that made us, boy, it's notice of an indefinite vacation to take place at once!" And he threw the paper on the table with the impatience that characterized his movements at times of petty annoyance.

"Well?"

"Can't allow it; can't allow it. Not if we have to double her wages. Jean's a jewel. Help like her's is too rare to spare her. Well, if we are to watch Uncle Fuller cut a wide swath to-night with tree toads nested in his hair, we'd better close shop."



## XI

### “HOW UNCLE FULLER DONE THE TOWN”

From the office of Snowdon and Son, Jean took her way down the stairs. She would hazard less chance of drawing curiosity that way than if she took the elevator. In the street she rubbed elbows with several speaking acquaintances, but to her knowledge none deigned the prematurely maiden lady even a glance. Once she had gained the avenue her first act was to hasten to a news-stand and purchase a copy of the *Evening Breeze*. Then she took a King Street car for the suburbs to read the dreaded announcement in the seclusion of her room. On the car she was forced to crowd into a seat occupied by the plate-passer of her church who very evidently did not relish her company, for he turned to the window a face as long and dismal as a coffin. She reflected for the moment on how quickly a change of dress will bring on social ostracism by the snobbish. His finical relief when she rose to leave the car forced an unwilling smile.

Mrs. MacIntyre met her at the door, her face very visibly set in a fixture of purpose.

“Jean, lassie, A’m conveenced th’ cross that’s hangin’ aboon yeer heid is far mair grave than th’ mole yeer wearin’ on yeer neck or th’ pesterin’ of John Snowdon. A’ll nae be brushed aside till I hae th’ secreet frae yeer lips, gin it puts ye tae yeer bed. Go noo tae yeer room an’ tak’ a bath, then dress yersel’ aince mair in true United States an’ coom doon tae th’ best supper that’s in me tae prepare. At th’ table, ye’ll free yeer breest o’ th’ secreet. Gin it’s nae shameful dishonor, A’ll put th’ strangth o’ me against it tae drive it awa’. A’m in deid earnest an’ dinna throw up yeer han’s noo; A’ll hae it oot o’ ye this nicht. Ye’ll nae be better till ye’ve onloaded.”

“O, Mrs. MacIntyre,” Jean threw up her hands in helpless surrender, “it’s nothing—but—well——”

“Hisht, noo! A’ll wait yeer coomin’.”

“I’m skating on very thin ice in Petrolia tonight but another crack may not let me through before I run away tomorrow, so Mrs. MacIntyre may have the chance to add the crack if she chooses,” mentally cogitated Jean as she flew up the stairs. “If it gets into the papers, how far will I have to travel to outdistance it! Tokio or Shanghai? Heigho! No; it will be ‘back tae me ain countrie’—Scotland.” And she drew a deep breath of relief at the thought of a haven far beyond the sea.

She was growing braver now as time elapsed and calmly she opened the paper after she had flounced into the embrace of the big armchair, upholstered by Mother MacIntyre, and read:

“What promises to be one of the finest attractions of the season comes to the opera house to-night. At the Arlington, Miss Cloverbloom and Uncle Fuller, two stars of greatest magnitude that accompany the cast, dined to-day and captivated some of our best connoisseurs of dramatic talent. We predict a capacity house for the play, ‘How Uncle Fuller Done the Town.’ Don’t miss it.”

“I hope the thing will come up to standards,” mused Miss MacCrea. “We will be ready for the next town tomorrow, Uncle Fuller, I’m thinking, if the bill boards exaggerate. I’ve got to quit mourning and meet the situation as Jim would. Dear old Jim! Never crosses bridges till he comes to them. I’m a victim. I’ve done nothing wrong. Guess by the way my blood is beginning to rush, I’m harking back to clan. Chased and hounded as the MacGregors were, they were invincible. Always came back again.

“‘While there’s spray on the heath and foam on the river,  
The name of MacGregor shall flourish forever.’”

“Now, Auntie MacIntyre, I’m ready for your block and ax.”

When she entered the room she saw that Mrs. MacIntyre had done her best in the way of refreshments before the fall to come, if fall it was to be. The small room was a side room of the cottage, the outer wall one vast window, set in a border of small square panes of vari-colored glass. On the sill a row of potted roses was a profusion of blooms. On the one-legged, claw-footed table, spread with snowy linen, the daintiest of china, decorated with tea-roses, held scones, her favorite delectation, little iced cakes and fresh peaches. As the hostess stepped into the kitchen for the tea urn Jean wondered how much she would be able to dispense with before the blow fell.

Now Mrs. MacIntyre was a widow in comfortable circumstances, providing she practiced reasonable frugality. Her "ain bairns" were four, all married and scattered a long time since, and she had taken Jean in really for companionship. She had come to love the modest lassie, but she maintained an austere code of morals; and Jean felt it hopeless to attempt to expect her to compromise with her tangle.

"Noo, oot wi' yeer woe an' we'll baith eat wi' mair peace o' min'," commanded the executioner before the beginning.

If ever a story was finely told, Jean MacCrea told hers that way—heart and soul. First, she spoke of her friendship with Jim Snowdon as she had often spoken of it before. He had been a benefactor and his remembrance she held most dear. He was threatened. She must get word to him quickly in the hills. There had seemed no way to send the message except by the grotesque messenger. When she came to old Milt's order to the waiter, Mrs. MacIntyre, who sat looking dazed like an owl in the glare of the mid-day sun, interrupted for the first time:

"Oonder God, whatever could ye be doin' in there wi' that meenagerie? Before A' wad hae trailed in there wi' that auld cracklin', A'd a tramped a' th' way tae th' hills wi' th' card mysel'. Weel, gae on wi' it an' tell hoo at last ye waur baith flung oot o' there."

Jean smiled grimly at the foreshadowed verdict and resolutely proceeded. The old lady maintained a rigid

silence through the remainder of the narrative, looking as if it were a story of the moon people. At the finish, she handed Jean her cup.

“A dinna ken what tae spak. Eat, Jean MacCrea. Dinna let it ruin yeer appetite for the scones an’ pressed meat. A’ neever failed tae preach tae me ain bairns, coom deith but God spare me frae disgrace. What is this? Ma heid is swimmin’ wi’ it. Will ye no rise an’ light the jet? A’ dare nae rise.”

Jean rose and lit the jet. The bright light flooded her face and the shadows of her hair.

“Hae some o’ the pine-apple jelly for th’ scones,” resumed Mrs. MacIntyre, helping her to a shell. “An’ eat hearty, Jean MacCrea. Noo, hoo can A’ sympathize? Whaur tae begin an’ what at, doos ma weets confound. But eat, Jean MacCrea, an’ brace for th’ morrow. Ye’ll hardly dare gae oot tae face th’ feenger eends.”

“Please remember, Mrs. MacIntyre, that I hav’n’t poured out my woes to you of my own volition. I ask no sympathy, perhaps deserve none. I am managing very well. I have only one regret. I wanted to see Jim before I go.” Though her voice was trembling she was far from breaking down. Then, as Mrs. MacIntyre did not express further opinion, she added: “If you wish, Mrs. MacIntyre, I will find another lodging place in the morning to save ‘finger ends’ from poking at your house. There is a hope and a chance, however, of my identity’s not being discovered if I mask till the thing blows over. Couldn’t I just give it a trial?”

Mrs. MacIntyre was buttering a scone and trying to collect her senses. “Ye’ll nae quit ma hoose, chiel, but A’m free tae admit ye’ve behaved like a deevil wi’oot smeerchin yeer charecter. A’ll nae be knockin’ ye for what A’ dinna oonderstand mysel’: what kind o’ a prank ye cut tae oopset me but ye’ve nae mither an’, Jean, luk me fu’ in th’ face, noo—Mither MacIntyre A’ am forever tae th’ freendless. But A’d like ma Scotch raised tae defeend ye, lassie, for a deefereent performance than ye’ve juist telt me. We’re tae pick nae crow thegither ower this an’ yee’re nae tae leave me for’t an’ A’m tae guide

yeer feet in carefu' ways frae th' time tae coom. A' lo'e ye, Jean, like ma veery ain, an' A'll stan' by in what is richt. Dinna refuse ma cake, noo an' the iced fruit. We'll clear th' table thegither, then ye'll read tae me till yeer bed time an' we'll sleep as in th' auld lang syne an' throw cares tae th' winds."

The next morning Jean went out again in the same style of dress that she had worn the previous afternoon but for the hat which her fingers had deftly remodeled to a more becoming shape. Her plan now was just to await developments. Soon her attention was drawn to something out of the ordinary. At nearly every stop of the car, passengers, principally men, were sure to come aboard either with blackened eyes or faces dressed with patches. Occasionally, a woman would bear marks of an accident; one, in particular, had her wrist in splints and carried it in a sling. The general excited conversation of the traveling public was in reference to a riot that had taken place. Where—when—why? The questions surged through Jean's mind. When she alighted at her destination above the usual din of trucks and drays rattling over the pavement, gongs of street cars and honks of autos, came the cries of newsboys: "*Morning Sun*. Tells all about the riot at the show last night." Feverishly she availed herself of a paper and a glance at the headlines confirmed her suspicion. The entire first page was devoted to the news of the affray: "*Great Riot at the Petrolia Opera House. All Hell's Horned Cattle Break Loose. Several Severely Injured. Many Bearing Ugly Cuts and Bruises as the Result of 'How Uncle Fuller Done the Town'.*"

This shocking intelligence set her heart thumping like a drum. What might lie in wait for her when she reached the office? An instinct warned her to flee. As she stood undecided, a man brushing past her remarked to his pal that ten had been arrested already. Somehow, somehow, it was then that the image of Jim Snowdon rose vividly before her. Was he near? She could almost feel his presence. He would appear in time of trouble; of this she felt assured. She had seen him in very trying cir-

cumstances and at such times he appeared his coolest, seeming almost to have a superhuman control of himself. Right now he would say: "Go on, Jean, see it to a finish." The thought renewed her strength and restored her faltering courage, somewhat. She decided to go on.

When he entered the office, she found Snowdon and Son already there. The older man looked somewhat touseled in appearance and dress—something entirely new for him. But John, Jr.! Around one eye was a highly colored purple circle, a patch on one cheek covered a cut, his upper lip was badly swollen, and one front tooth had disappeared since the night before. He had been slugged. She paused at the table where the elder Snowdon was sitting, pawing over papers and snarling at every one around him like the proverbial old bear with the sore head.

"Is my resignation accepted, Mr. Snowdon?"

"Not yet, Miss MacCrea. Can you not content yourself till noon; then perhaps we may be able to arrange for your retention with infinite satisfaction to all. I am deluged this morning with rental papers."

And as one born to subordinate, he waved her toward her place of work. Seating herself, she perused the paper with sickening heart.

What was undoubtedly the worst company that ever desecrated the opera house, visited Petrolia last night and finished up with a holocaust. The house was packed to suffocation—every available seat and inch of standing room were early taken. When the curtain went up, a farm-yard scene was represented. The scenery looked like the amateurish daub of a school boy. Uncle Fuller, a tall, waspish prototype of the most lamentable order of the clod-hopper, appeared chasing sunshine with a bush to sprout an onion bed. Miss Cloverbloom, the vaunted star, large and ample, sat on a fence, presumably watching a turkey. She started in on her lines with a voice like a Holstein but broke down—the fence. This play had crossed two states to make this stand and how it happened they were here—ask the agent who booked it.

The boxes started to empty first not five minutes after the curtain had gone up. Then the house rose in one tumultuous burst. Some drunks made a start for the stage to pluck the performers. In the aisles, the rougher element began crowding, pushing, cursing and jeering. Like 'Tim Finnegan's Wake' soon the ruction did begin; 'twas 'woman to woman and man to man.' With screams and agonizing cries they were soon tramping, struggling, hip and thigh, tooth and nail, in a stampede for the doors. It was fully an hour before the house was cleared but the battle was carried to the street and not before the Fire Department was called out and turned the hose on the frenzied mass did the horrible uproar end. Very luckily, no one was killed as far as ascertained before going to press, but many were seriously impaired. Among the number severely injured was Mrs. Peter Stuyvesant-Fisk, hurt after she had gained the street and taken to the hospital.

What became of the barn-yard talent is shrouded in mystery. They suddenly faded like the moon behind a scurrying cloud.

Now, then: Who are the pair that posed as Miss Cloverbloom and Uncle Fuller at the Arlington, yesterday? Are they connected with the play at all? We say no. The Uncle Fuller of Arlington notoriety ascended in an airplane for a ride, yesterday afternoon, with two of our most estimable city boys and requested them to land him on Sam Hill east of town as they did. Uncle Fuller started botanizing while they waited. When he failed to return in reasonable time, they started a search and kept it up till dark; then returned to town and reported a lost man. Who and where is the girl that accompanied the old charlatan?

Now, fair Petrolia, the celebrated question comes home to you, "Who struck Billy Patterson?"

But Jean could read no farther. Her face as bloodless as a statue, her hands clutched together, she lifted her troubled eyes again to the hills far beyond an excited city

sufficiently incensed to burn the culprit at the stake. The meshes of the net seemed tightening and narrowing around her. How long would her overstrung nerves endure before they snapped? Already a sickening feeling was creeping over her. If exposure overtook her, the public would never be made to see the occurrence in its true light. Behind her sat two victims of last night's farce. John, Jr., battered and swollen, paled in comparison beside Petrolia's octopus, whose unassailable dignity had suffered gross indignities, though he came through the carnage without blemish. Dragged to the house of mirth, figuratively, reluctantly submitting so that his domestic felicity might not suffer a rupture, then dragged out, literally, his highness in his outraged pride was now chopping off heads right and left.

Already she might be under surveillance, she felt. Yet John, Jr.'s smile had seemed to smack of the genuine when he greeted her. Oh, those peaceful, blue hills lying far beyond her reach, their summits clothed in enclantment. "Could I ever walk there?"—her lips were moving, and, strangely enough, came the prayer, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help."

"You have a 'phone call, Miss MacCrea," interrupted the older man at this juncture.

"Some guardian angel must have hovered over you and kept you from attending pandemonium last night," said John, Jr. almost gladly as she falteringly passed him on the way to the 'phone. No note of sarcasm was in his voice, and this was reassuring. They did not suspect her.

"From a shambles one would think it was, judging by your lumped head," snarled the elder.

Jean's hand shook when she lifted the receiver to her ear. Was the skeleton in the closet about to begin to rattle?

"You're sick, Jean," said her employer softening. "Be seated while you use the 'phone."

She sank limply down. "Hello!"

"Hello, Jean, is this you?" O, wonderful, wonderful voice!

"Yes."



"Do you recognize the voice, the man from Burnbrae, from the land of the heather-bloom, Jean?"

"Yes," she replied guardedly and he caught the tremor in her voice.

"This is the way it is to be. Get off as early as possible. When you get home, call 180-M', undertand me?"

"Yes."

"I will get your residence then and come. Understand?"

"Yes."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Jim Snowdon was in town. He had come from the hills in answer to prayer. Jean did not find it difficult to rise this time. Up and back to her chair she fairly flew, her face radiant with supreme joy. The instantaneous change did not fail to catch John, Jr.'s eye and much perplexed him, but his mind was not resourceful enough to divine the cause. No longer was she like the hunted doe listening to the bay of the hounds as they drew in from every side, for before her now was the protecting voice and arm of **Jim**.

What a joyous morning, contrary to expectation, she now found herself passing. It was difficult to comprehend the sudden, happy change that had timely arriven.

She worked with a dash and vigor that astonished her employers that forenoon. And when at 11.30 she was granted permission to go, she fairly flew, unmindful of the indefinite leave of absence that she had sought.

"Unfathomable little witch!" barked Snowdon, Sr. when she had closed the door behind her.

"Most beautiful girl in Petrolia!"

"I see, sir, of late if you chance to pass a calico rag hung out on a clothesline, you are enamored," snapped the older man concernedly. "There is Miss Lillian Stuyvesant-Fisk worthy of quest. Why do you not seek the company of your equals?"

"There is Miss Lillian Stuyvesant-Fisk as soulless and bloodless as a gargoyle but for paint," returned the younger with pronounced antipathy for the acceptable in question.

## XII

### WHEREIN CADMUS TAKES A PEEP INTO THE FUTURE

“Mr. Doolittle?”

“Yes, what’s wanted. ‘O, for a lodge in some vast wilderness.’ O, for one unobtrusive moment to read a newspaper undisturbed. Just struck a seat first time since I started in this morning and I’ve wrought all day. Up all night, too, after that show, nursing Uncle Fuller’s legacy. Feel as though I’d been run through a hemp mill. Well, what is it, my love?”

Mrs. Doolittle flushed a trifle at the gruff answer to her call. Mr. Doolittle was ensconced in his private den, second floor over the cafe, and she was standing outside the door. Usually his time for going into seclusion was evening; not often seclusion proper, for this was his club-room, his smoker, where he fraternized with a few chosen cronies. But to betake himself there in the afternoon and leave behind him a threat to the porter that he would brick him if called, was portentous. A charming woman was Mrs. Doolittle, presiding over Petrolia’s most guilded hostelry and unaccustomed to such brusqueness from her lord. But then she had promised to honor and obey.

The door opened slightly and Doolittle peered out.

“What’s the matter?” he asked.

“Matter enough when a big six-footer—looks like a Westerner—comes into the lobby and says if he can’t see you when you’re in he’ll rush the house with real Indian pleasure. Keeps laughing all the time, so guess he doesn’t mean to scalp you and carry me away.”

“What does he look like?”

“That’s it. He’s as handsome as a bandit or the clerk would have called a police. Has a town boy with him that I’ve seen in here frequently for meals so I think you are in no danger of being kidnapped. Well, what shall I say?”

Mr. Doolittle was uneasy. This was why he had withdrawn into his shell. He would have to shoulder much of the blame for the catastrophe at the Bijou. Not a few had been in already demanding explanations. He had got himself into an abominable predicament by presuming that he was entertaining theatrical stars. Now Petrolia was nursing grudges while the stars had faded.

"Shall I tell him to go on and tear down the house and throw it out of the windows? That you are hibernating or something as reasonable?"

Her spouse rallied. "Send on your iron-toothed blood-suckin', limb-tearin' man-eatin', house-cleanin' tornado from the West." Then he added by way of precautionary measures, "Better send the porter with him to take care of the remains"—and to himself, "Got to face the music. May as well offer myself up to this one for a starter."

Burgundy and Havannas might have the effect of soothing the savage. These with a silver decanter and glasses, he brought from a buffet and placed on the marble-topped table where they would be likely to catch the eye upon first entrance. Easy chairs, half lounges, upholstered with the finest of Spanish leather banished weariness upon sight. If entertainment would assuage a tempest, here were the emollients. Doolittle assumed it was a "sorehead" approaching, a survivor of the battle who was seeking to chastise him unless he could prove that he himself had been duped.

Merry voices and a laugh that would have caused smiles to flicker over the face of a statue rang through the hall and partially dispelled the fears of Doolittle. He stood in the door waiting. As they came up, two of them, Doolittle gave a shout of surprise and grasped Jim Snowdon's hand.

"Well, Jim, old top, how art thou?" he chuckled drawing him into the room and leading him to a seat. "Great Scot—yes, great Scot, that's what you are, Jim—my wife had me barricading up here a moment ago against a western tornado. When did you drop down? Let me see; you are located now up in the hills. Glad to see you back." As he talked he took a seat facing Snowdon

but not before he had seated his companion, who proved to be a reporter for the *Morning Sun*. Fred Pinks was the young man, a boon companion of Jim's before Jim had left five years before for the West.

"I came from Tulsa, Oklahoma, several weeks ago, Ben," replied Jim suavely as he settled into the great restful chair, easily fitting himself to things luxurious, proving there had been a time when he was accustomed to comforts. "I have ambitions, Ben, but like Caesar's perhaps they may kill me yet. I am endeavoring to sprout an oil field in those old gaunt hills of mine, a bit of the earth's surface that nobody seemed to want to own until it was foisted on me through the chicanery of a relative. Now the gold of King Midas could not buy it. No, no wine thank you, Ben, to set my head spinning."

"Just one glass, Jim, for old acquaintance sake," entreated Doolittle. "One glass will only lubricate your tongue."

"And there would be nothing but tongue with an addled brain behind it."

"When did you come down from the hills, Jim?" inquired Doolittle a trifle ill at ease, the more so because of the presence of a reporter.

"This morning."

The answer quieted his fears. "Lucky, for if you had been in Petrolia last night, today you might"—here he paused and regarded Jame's fine physique.

"Might need an obituary written for me?"

"Might be accountable for corpses, I was going to say, remembering your punch. Look at my face. Suppose you heard all about the wild west we had here in Petrolia last night."

"Yes. It seems to be the most popular theme of the town for the hour, though I noticed toward noon the angry mood of the crowds that was manifest all morning was giving way somewhat and the people are coming more and more to regard the affair in the light of a huge joke. The boys are comparing wounds and disputing the honors for bravery. Isn't that true, Fred?"

"Yes, time heals all wounds but those of love," was the

response of the reporter, who was busy with a very small pad and pencil, quite out of sight and unobserved by Doolittle.

"I hope it will cool down," said Doolittle ruefully. "You know they blame me, Jim, for the whole cussed thing."

Snowdon could laugh heartily and jovially. For him to indulge just then was not in good taste considering Doolittle; but he lacked all regard now for the man and gave way to one wild, loud roar. Pinks joined him and Doolittle labored to force a smile, but found it hard work.

"It's not such a sight of fun, Jim, after all, when you are threatened and hunted by the whole town, and carrying a broken head into the bargain. I thought I was killed several times before I got out. O, it was just a shambles and the wonder is how any one got out alive."

"Why does the populace pick you for the goat?"—though Jim knew well enough.

"Have you heard about that pair, that old man and girl, who were in here for dinner yesterday, Jim?"

"Yes."

"Right there is something that would puzzle all the oracles of Delphi. I was certain when the old man reeled off that speel to the waiter they belonged with that show. But they were not the Uncle Fuller and Miss Cloverbloom that appeared with the cast. Well, you've heard, Jim, how I connected them with the play?"

"Yes."

"Well, who are they, then, if not traveling with that concern?"

"Did you ever see the girl before?"

"No, nor the old man that I remember."

"You just lined them up with the troop on supposition?"

"Yes."

"They were in no wise to blame for the hoax?"

"No."

"Think if you would have the whole story come out in its true light with apologies for the blunder on your part and a confession that you have no idea who the parties were you falsely exploited—have Fred here write a 're-

portorial' in his usual artistic manner for the *Sun*—the nasty affair would soon lose its sting and live only as a celebrated joke. What think you, Doolittle?" asked Jim, earnestly seeking to pour oil on the troubled waters for all concerned. To get Doolittle's apology into print would better Jean's evading detection, providing she did not again wear the costume in which she had appeared at the Arlington.

"Do you hear that, Fred?" cried the elated Doolittle, springing up and grasping Snowdon's hand. "I say, do you hear that? Jim, you were noted for your adept ways of handling ticklish situations before you left Petrolia, and here you appear again, cleaning up this mess that an unruly imagination got me into. Fred, you'll write it according to specifications and I believe it will have a decided tendency to soothe the injured public. What about it?"

"That's what I came for," smiled the reporter, who had been busy from the beginning taking notes. "I'll embellish it my best, Doolittle; make you out a regular fancy liar, see? Plenty of frills in a flick like this sets the world laughing. Those who still keep sore, keep quiet. And that's the purpose."

"Jim Snowdon, your invitation to free meals at the Arlington stands as long as the house stands," cried Doolittle.

"Hold, I've not finished my mission yet, Ben," said Jim rising and for the first time looking troubled. "Now, we take up the lassie whom you salt-and-peppered. She is living in terror, Ben. She feels you made her responsible for the riot last night and wants to leave Petrolia. She is a working girl and really has no home. She will forfeit a good job if she leaves. Where will she go? She was in here at your place innocently taking a friend to dinner; your waiter insulted him and the old coon evened up. Then you capped the climax. Well, upon my advice she is going to remain in Petrolia and run the gauntlet. Now to remain, she must keep shaded and change her attire. Extra attire costs something for a working girl, eh? Catch the notion?"

Doolittle's eyes were fairly bulging from their sockets with surprise. "Who is the girl, Jim?"

"Glad you don't know. Hope you never may. It's hard work to help hold a secret."

"Do you know, Fred?"

"Positively, I do not."

Jim was slightly nettled. "Well, Mr. Doolittle, I think it is as little as you can do to stop prying and cough up enough to buy the girl a new outfit. You can thank your lucky stars you are not arrested for libel."

"My Lord, yes, Jim! How much do you want for a new toggery for the girl? Been thinking of that all along. For how much will I write the check?" And he brought a check-book out of his pocket.

"I make no demands; take no checks. Donate something if you wish and hand it to Fred," responded Jim, exercising caution to avoid further altercations.

"Fred doesn't know her," corrected Doolittle with a touch of sarcasm.

"Well, I do; but I don't take money from you. The girl wouldn't take a cent of it, either, if she knew how it came. I have to manage very carefully. If I didn't think you deserved a lickin', I wouldn't take it."

Meanwhile Doolittle counted out bills—fifty dollars—and handed the money to Fred Pinks. "Is that enough?" he asked.

"Plenty, Mr. Doolittle. You have done beautifully," said Jim, offering his hand. And he and the reporter were off. Doolittle ran after them calling, "Well, good-bye Jim; think it'll all fair up when Fred's flame comes out. Tell 'em I'm quarantined for broken leg, Reporter."

\* \* \* \* \*

James had met Jean that day at Mrs. MacIntyre's and the meeting had been most tender. Strangely enough, with all Jean's charms and beauty, he had only affection for her; when stronger emotion began to stir he had always made a struggle against it. He felt she needed a friend, not a lover, until the time arrived when she might choose free from thoughts of gratitude. He attempted no advances in the way of love. When apart, Jean felt that she

loved her brawny champion, but whenever they met, an awe of the man's greatness and largeness of heart seized upon her and restraint held her captive. She trusted him with all her soul, and the unfaltering trust was so apparent that he ever kept her before him as the tearful, confiding lassie he had brought from Burnbrae. But to-day?

To Mother MacIntyre, James was a knight-errant down from the hills to save the day. The moment her eyes beheld the Scotchman, quick to read character, she settled upon him her affections unalloyed, and together they became the Advisory Board to decide the question for Jean. It seemed best for the girl to remain in Petrolia at her post for the present, or at least until better provisions could be made for her. The moment breakers threatened, there would be another session of the Board to determine a course of action.

MacNaughton's Emporium, the store of ladies' ready made attire, was the best place to refit her quickly and there the Board decided to conduct Jean as soon as dinner was over. She protested at Jim's proposal to pay the bills.

"Why not?" asked Jim. "You drew notoriety by an unlucky attempt to warn me quickly of danger. Now we must exercise wariness to obscure you, and I alone should furnish finance. Get ready now, and I'll whisk you to the store in my Nancy Hooter so swiftly no one will notice you. Don't you wish to accompany Jean, Mrs. MacIntyre?"

"Ye're veery kind, Meester. A' will. Fuirst A'll comb Jean's wig United States an' a noo hat will change 'er heid till nane can tell 'er. Rise, noo, Jean lassie, an' we'll mak' haste. But yee're tae toss them black glasses intae th' reever as we spin ower th' brig an' defy them that gaze," remonstrated Mother MacIntyre.

"My heart is brimming over," said Jean with one of her old-time happy smiles. "Don't think I'll drop back into fear and morbidness again, let come what may."

"That's right. My telephone call is at Hardwick's, Comfort. They will get me word. Speak your name



to the man and I'll be here on the wings of the wind; I'll take you and Auntie to the hills for ransom," laughed Jim.

"A'm nae worth it," laughed auntie, "Ye'll bring me awa' when I scold."

"Petrolia is a veery beautiful toon, Meester Snowdon," remarked Mrs. MacIntyre, leaning forward to catch Jim's ear as they rolled along.

"And we'll all be living here in marble fronts when I strike oil," he returned.

"Miss Cloverbloom centrally located in the élite row," lent Jean in derision.

At their destination, Jim waited outside in the car while Jean arranged her camouflage. In good time out she came again as from a chrysalis, costumed in a gray suit, trimmed with black, and a smart winged hat.

"You've perfected the disguise. Your closest friend would scarcely recognize you," said Jim in admiration as they stood on the curb beside the car.

"A've this left aifter the purchase, Jamie," said Mrs. MacIntyre familiarly as she handed him a bill. "She's noo trigged aince mair tae set young Jock's heart palpitatin', A'm sure, lookin' aince mair good auld United States."

"If he catches the news that I am the cause of his beauty marks, my pretty suit won't appeal to his affections any longer," added Jean, smoothing back teasing fluffs of hair that the wind blew around her face.

Jim was tinkering at the steering gear of the car. The stroke of one from the old clock in the steeple of St. Cyr proclaimed that the noon hour of recess for the toiler had ended. Jim ceased work on the loose machinery of Riley's rattle-wagon and took Jean's hand. "Well, now I must say good-bye, little girl. I must not detain you longer to get you into ill repute with your employers. I will run Mrs. MacIntyre back home—"

"Ye'll run me back hame? Hoot mon ye'll no run me back hame!" interrupted Mrs. MacIntyre with a touch of spirit.

"Excuse me," he laughed. "I'll take Mrs. MacIntyre back home, then interview Doolittle. Look for a refutation in the morning paper. Well, bye-bye, lassie. Don't

worry"—she was touching her eyes with her handkerchief—"better days are coming. I'll be often back again."

"Hist, noo," broke in Mrs. MacIntyre. "Dinna be sniffin' in courtship on the street. Gae, Jean, tae yaer wark. Yer baith young yit an' can be marrit in yeer ain gude time"—and they waited for no more lest she plight them in betrothal irrevocably.

\*                    \*                    \*                    \*                    \*                    \*

When James and Cadmus rolled into Petrolia that morning, Cadmus had decided that he looked too woodsy from long isolation to attempt to cultivate the acquaintance of fair lady. It was therefore agreed that he take in the sights of the city while James ascertained the status of Miss Cloverbloom. Cad was to report hourly at a designated place where a 'phone call would catch him in case his services were required. His first amusement were the varied tales of last night's horror paramount on every tongue, related on curb and corner. Weary of this, he strolled till noon, had dinner and rested. No report coming in, he sauntered forth again and was strolling down Main Street when, right across the street from him, stood the camouflaged Miss Cloverbloom, James and Mother MacIntyre! Unobserved, he veered to the wall of a building and took a point of vantage from which he could secretly revel in the beauty of Petrolia's enigma. Jean's attractiveness made quick work of his heart. She did not possess the Madonna-like sweetness he had pictured but hers was a type undebatably lovely and her mischievous gaiety rather matched his own.

"Fine Romeo I make skulking here, sneaking a look at her," he mentally soliloquized, for Cad was no mean reader of the muses. "Should she look my way, it would be 'Romeo, avaunt,' instead of 'Romeo, where art thou?' Wonder if there might be ever the shadow of a chance for me? With Jim singing and throwing fits over 'Loch Lomon', she might fall my way sometime. Support a wife? Well, if old Jim strikes oil, I am to come in on it."

It was at this point that a happy remembrance struck Cad. In his wanderings, he had read the sign over a door, "Mme. La Rooche, Scientific Astrologist. Reads

Past, Present and Future." Impulsively he started back for the place where he had read the sign. "Now we see who gets her, Jamie, thanks to the occult!" he breathed rejoicingly.

He soon entered a hallway that led upstairs to offices and apartments. On the upper floor, the second door right bore the name of the fortune-teller. He knocked to avoid intrusion and the door was softly opened by a freckled-faced boy in blouse and knee pants who ushered him in and seated him in the waiting-room.

"Yez'll soon know whether yez are to be hung or shot for there's only one ahead of yez," asserted the youth and Cad knew his forebears were from Erin.

"Well, I'll never be drowned," he returned, "for I swim the Atlantic Ocean every morning before breakfast."

"Ye're some whale all right," said the boy squinting an eye at him and handing him a magazine, a contribution he always made to the entertainment of those waiting.

"That's me," laughed Cad, "and I've trout for company, wearing his speckles, I see."

"Ah, g'wan!" laughed the lad. "That's the bell for yez if yez are in. Come this way."

Cadmus followed to the consultation room and met an old man on his way out, looking very happy over his forecast.

Mme. La Rooche was seated behind a velvet-covered table whereon stood a globe with an owl perched on top, a fine picce of taxidermy. She was past middle age, rather thin, and gaudily garbed in the manner of the ancient Egyptians. The silk turban, the large loops in her ears, the mystic figures on the loose flowing robes, brought up the court of the Pharaohs before Cadmus. At intervals over the black velvet tapestry hung on the walls of the room were spangled silvery planetary systems all attesting the great gift of Mme. La Rooche.

Cad bowed respectfully and Mademoiselle pointed to a seat at the opposite side of the table. "You may tell me what year and on what day of what month you were born," she began.

He gave the dates and added that he had been told

it was during the worst thunder storm ever known to the oldest inhabitants.

"This brings you under Venus," she said puckering her mouth and drawing her brows of wisdom. "This planet was in conjunction with Mars at the time of that midnight disturbance. You were born when the sign was wrong and you have given more or less kick ever since. Had you been born when the sign was in the head instead of the feet you would have spread over something less than an acre of ground.

"You wouldn't advise me then to garden?" he asked. He might as well get all the information possible for his money.

"Never attempt it on anything smaller than a section of land. Your paths would have to be very wide. Your health is very good and you——"

——"will never die unless I'm killed," he interrupted, happy in the thought of a remarkable longevity.

——"will take good care of it when there is work around, I was about to say," she finished. "People who are born under the reign of the crab are apt to be crabbed. You have wonderful lung compass and the gastric and dilating powers of the Anaconda."

"I used to travel with a box of snakes showing at the county fairs," said Cad, seeking to encourage her.

"You are not easily upset," she went on seemingly somewhat more in his favor. "A strong cyclone that would carry away a brick-yard or tip over a trans-continental train would not turn you about unless it caught behind one of your ears."

"Do you think I have sufficient ear expansion to sail a yacht if I train to catch the wind?"

"You will be married early," she continued unmindful of his query, "but your wife will be very unhappy. She will be much happier during her second marriage."

"That's to old Jim," he fairly shouted. "I knew he'd get her at last."

"Not if you cross my palm with an extra silver dollar."

"I'll wait to hear what kind of flowers they furnish me before I put more money into this."

"You will prosper better in business matters, in partnerships with colored men," she gloomily continued. "You have a constructive mind and you can construct hoodoo figures that will frighten them out of the business, fearing to remove a cent.

"Mondays will be your best days on which to borrow money. Thursdays will be your best days for dodging payment.

"Look out for an old man with a jolly face and a growth of whiskers around it looking like a sheep-skin."

"That's old Milt Cobb," snickered Cadmus.

"I see him clearly in the horoscope," resumed the fortune-teller. "Do not trust him in the dark on any account, for he is crafty.

"You would succeed well as a dancer, but not as a poet. One would have to burn a rag while reading your verse.

"There comes a time when you are prosperous. I see you smoking a good cigar and trying to buy a seat in the House of Representatives. But you fail in business before the deal is closed and fall back to your old trade, rejuvenating cuspidors and abstracting snipes."

"But do you discover anything off there that indicates that I will ever rise again in the financial scale?" inquired Cadmus.

"No, not clearly. But hold a moment. Your horoscope begins to grow clearer. Venus bisects the orbit of Mars and I see you relieved considerably in your monetary prostration. A large dark gentleman rises above the horizon and lends you quite a sum of money with the advice to flee the country."

"After the flight if there is anything left, would you advise me to visit some cool, quiet, restful, fashionable resort?"

"Yes."

"In winter time, would you advise me to try the Poles?"

"No, nor yet hades in very warm weather."

"So you see for me an early marriage, with hurricanes along the Atlantic seaboard and much damage to shipping while blizzards are raging in the Northwest?"

"I do."

“Do you see no way to withstand the tying of this early nuptial knot?”

“No; not unless you jilt the present centre of your warm affections and take up with some ugly, hooked-nosed virago who can support you. Courtship would not be so hasty on your part perhaps.”

“Have you any marriagable sisters that fit the description and whom I might succeed in winning to insure me a swifter death, Mademoiselle La Rooche?”

She leaned forward and fastened a pair of yellow eyes on him like an enraged tigress.

They were even then in the act of hasty rising, but the sibyl proved more fleet of foot in the effort to gain the door. With one bony claw Mademoiselle La Rooche clutched his hair but he made the stairs, then the street in several wild bounds.

After leaving the Arlington in company with the reporter of the *Morning Sun*, Jim was just passing the entrance way to the rooms of Mme. La Rooche when imagine his surprise and chagrin at having Allen burst out upon them, hatless and flurried, to be presented to Mr. Pinks, chief of the editorial staff of Petrolia's most popular and time-honored publication.

## XIII

### THE BALLET OF THE BIRDS AND MILTON

Russet autumn had passed. The foliage of the hills had changed to naked woods. Winds, never weary, solemnly sougled through the tree-tops. Over head, clouds of crows circled and cawed in noisy council—laggards of the season. Flocks of wild geese in flight southward presaged a snow to follow in their wake.

When one room of the cabin at Hermit Spring had been completed, the happy bachelors (as far as bachelors are happy) moved in. Time forbade further house building until spring, for there was the rig for the drilling well to be finished before the really cold weather began. Snug but convenient had been their aim. The fire-place of rough stone-work and cement half filled one end-wall of the room, and when the first fire was kindled, crackling and roaring up the great-throated chimney, Cadmus declared it “a thing of beauty and a joy forever.” Milt standing before it alternately turning to toast front and back had stated with bitterness, “The man that set up the first stove killed comfort deader’n hay.” And James quoted,

“‘There wa’n’t no stoves till comfort died  
To roast ye to a puddin.’”

However, the small sheet-iron stove was retained near at hand for convenience as a means of cooking. A large window facing southward permitted a view of the broad valley below. Cad styled this their land of Canaan from which they were kept out for their sins, waiting for a Joshua to lead them in. Below the window, James had arranged a winter garden-box in which tea-roses and other varieties of flowers were now flourishing. At the ends of

the garden were pots of maiden-hair ferns. Evenings had been spent in smoothing the surface of the pine logs in the walls; then black walnut staining had been applied. Between the logs, the cement work was calcimined with a white adhesive preparation and the ceiling done wholly in white. When finished, the interior of the cabin presented a unique but pleasing appearance, though Milt had described it as like the tomb of St. Luke's Lazarus, were Jim out of it and only Cad left. Allen, devoid of respect for gray hair, impulsively responded that for Milt its penitentiary stripes would be very appropriate. But as Milt had once been held in durance vile for illegal fishing, the retort hit hard, too hard, and upon James was forced the unpleasant duty of intervention.

Just three articles of furniture had been purchased for the cabin-home: a kitchen cabinet, a white enameled bedstead, and a wardrobe. The rest of the furnishings were to be supplied by their own handiwork. Already they had completed a table, the top made of hard maple, polished and varnished till it shone like a mirror. To cover and ornament the framework underneath the top, they had split in halves cuts of small hickory logs and fastened the pieces, round side out, to the frame with screws, beveling corner angles to fit perfectly. For legs, they had used cuts of large poles of uniform size of the same wood; and the hard, bark lace-work, rubbed smooth and coated with black varnish, made them possessors of a table in style rare and strikingly their own. After the table came chairs. And now they were busy at work on two rustic rockers which were nearly finished. The backs and bottoms were woven mattings of willow branches which had been bunched and hung by the chimney till partly seasoned. Around the framework of the chairs, Cad had twined spiral coils of the woodbine, cut and untwisted from saplings where they wound. His artistic touches, proved him superior to James with his larger and more awkward hands; but James was quite willing to give him exclusive right of touches and kept whistling at the braggart's badinage while he applied himself chiefly to the stabler and more essential parts.



As things fashioned and grew at their hands, the greater grew their interest and delight in their surroundings. Not only were they living close to nature but in love and communion with her as she unfolded her secrets to them for the asking and bestowed her rich gifts for the taking. The hills and the woods were in their blood.

"Here's your chair of indolence completed, Baron. Come and try it," said Cadmus, having put the finishing touches on the rocker designated from the start as belonging to James. Then did the proud artisan push back the chair from him and stand and gaze on the achievement with an adoring wonder little short of that with which Michael Angelo surveyed his Madonna.

It was a windy evening with prospect of a storm. Electric lights glowed in the cabin. Below the pond, the turbine wheel, harnessed to a dynamo, furnished the energy, transferred by wires and transformed by incandescent lamps into heat and light that afforded the hermits a city luxury. Thus the wind without might rear and roar; with the fire on the hearth and the lights overhead, what cared they for the behavior of the elements. Snowdon sat by the table reading when the invitation came. He laid his paper down and rose to try the new seat of honor. Cushioned, too, it was for Cad had generously thrown in his coat. Flexible rounded back, flexible bottom and deep seat, rocking with a long even swing, the comfortable seat brought forth the exultation,

" 'I'd not change it for a kingdom,  
No, not I.' "

"O, King, live forever," quoth Cad, bowing before him with all the grace and homage of a courtier. Then he seated himself on a box, for his own chair was not yet completed, and their talk drifted into great expectations.

"Hark!" said James looking up. "Rain."

"Yes, and a cold one. End with snow."

"No Milt tonight and no bread."

"Bake pancakes till he hoves in."

"Bad day tomorrow for rig-building if it snows."

“‘Take no thought of the morrow’ says the Good Book,” cautioned Cadmus. “And, again, it says, ‘Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.’ If we can’t work we will hunt. You can fulfill Scripture for the day by being a Nimrod, a ‘mighty hunter before the Lord.’ So it reads, Snowdon.”

“Yes, but you are too flippant with passages of Scripture to possess the spirit of them. Instead of your meeting Scripture requirements, I notice you twist passages to cover your tracks, which is the way of the hypocrite, I warn you, my sophisticated friend,” laughed Jim, really in earnest.

“Why not sugar-coat your religion when it tastes of gall and wormwood? Why let the other fellow make for you a crown of thorns without objecting to the sharpness?”

“I don’t think it would be possible to fit your head with a crown of any kind, Cad; so never worry.”

“Insult me in your own house, will you, just because you are a bulwark of strength?” wailed Cadmus, throwing a log of wood onto the fire. “Or wad ye throw me oot intae the nicht and storm? Hoot, mon, but yeer cauld hearted!” he added as he resumed his seat.

At the dialect, Jim exploded with laughter, “Yeer veery mixed in matters sacred, but ye’ll git back in yeer ain gud time a’ve nae doot. An’ A’ could nae live in th’ hills we’oot yeer fash, sae yeer safe th’ nicht.”

“Hark!” said Cad. They listened. “Thought I heard a cough.”

Lark, lying on the hearth, head to the fire, now sprang up and trotted to the door, standing there whining and vigorously wagging his tail. “Some one is coming—perhaps Milt.” Before Jim could reach the door in stepped old Milt with a bag on his back and laden with snow.

“Give me a broom. Never seen sich a snow-storm in all my life. ’Tain’t been ten minutes sence it quit raining an’ turned ’n’ I’ll bet it’ll be knee deep in ten minutes more. What made me come? Out o’ bread ain’t ye? Then I knew if I waited till mornin’, couldn’t make it and be wuth a continental to work. Guess they’ll be little derrick buildin’ to-morrer if this keeps up. I lost my way once ’n’ thought I’se ’lected to sleep in a ‘Babes in the Woods’ bed

there one spell." He was stamping and shaking and sweeping himself as James relieved him of his burden, the dog leaping up on him for joy at meeting an old friend. When his flow of talk had run down, Jim inquired if it wasn't rather early for snow.

"No 'tain't. First falls of it ain't apt to sojourn long, as Jerushy Henshaw would say."

"Come over here to the fire," said Cad as he stirred it to a leaping flame. "Dry yourself; then I'll give you an electric shock to keep you from taking cold."

"I'll warrant ye've got plenty o' traps set fer me, Allen. 'Tain't never you, I've come to learn, if you ain't runnin' a string o' tools to jar up somebody. Ye see Ibby crossed over the woods to stay all night with Jerushy Henshaw 'n' that granted me a leave o' absence. Jerushy likes to have Ibby come over 'n' tell her fortune with tea grounds. 'Tain't so apt to come true as 'tis to have it told by the stars I've heerd." Here eye met eye. But Jim now placed his chair before the fire for Milt, so nothing further was said along the line of fortunes for the present.

"Them lights!" exclaimed Milt next, his eyes wandering to the electric lamps. Here was a new and wonderful device for his backwoods eye. Through the cement filling in the wall came a brass fitting representing a large flower stem. This curved upward and at a whorl of leaves divided into two pedicels, first rising then making graceful curves downward. At the end of each hung a white glass bell-shaped flower shade, the electric bulbs serving for the pistils. "Jacob's cattle! Wouldn't a sight of the cheerfulness in this here cabin put joy into the crabapple heart of an old maid. With all this heat 'n' light ye defy all frost. Strike oil and the world is yourn."

Meanwhile, during Milton's chortling over comforts so remote to the people of Nubbin Ridge, luxuries that are so often within comparatively easy reach if the hand but turn the key to nature's storehouse, Jim and Cad had dropped onto boxes. James was greatly interested at this particular moment in a carved wooden figure standing on a shelf underneath the light and wondering how it got there. He was positive it was not there ten minutes

before. Yet there it stood and no mistaking what it was intended to represent, crude burlesque as it was. Already it was too late to spirit it away before it would catch Milt's eye. Snowdon, nipping his lip, waited for the cloudburst which was imminent.

"I've got so I want to be over here the hull durin' time," Milt was saying. "Yer life here is free from a perpetual jaw. Hain't woke up out of a sound sleep to give an account of a last year——" He paused. The image had caught his eye. Slowly his jaw sagged; then he raised it, shifted his cud and swallowed hard, keeping his eyes riveted on an idol of the pet child of his fancy—the Hillside-Mooney! So plain was the likeness that he could not possibly confound it. At first sight of it, the old man's look was a mixture of wonder and chagrin. Then he sat glowering, his eyes narrowing. Another fling from Allen, he felt. Blood was getting bad between them—and this?

The base was a large punk, or fungus growth, that Allen had found on an old log and fastened to the wall a few days previous, merely for a curio, as Snowdon had supposed. The object stood about a foot in height. For the head, Riley had furnished one of Jerushy's garden gourds, the neck making an ideal nose with mouth cut beneath, squawberries for the red eyes, and fur, dyed red, for whiskers and hair. The body had been whittled from a block, the arms and legs, one short, from sticks; the coat and pants had been well tailored by the artful Cadmus. But the part of the joke that Milt did not relish was the lemon that stood on the head for a pumpkin and the toy horn attached to one arm.

Mr. Cobb was at the boiling point. He turned to Snowdon. "Jim, I didn't face the storm to-night to come over to be insulted," he said, his voice raucous.

Snowdon was looking annoyed. "My word, Mr. Cobb, I saw the shelf go up a few days ago but I did not dream of the purpose. Allen or the fairies are responsible for the appearance of Mr. Hillside-Mooney, done since you

came in. In truth I never saw nor was I aware of the existence of the thing before your coming."

Milt turned on Allen. "Oh, set there will ye, lookin' as solemn as an owl. Ye done it a purpose. All it lacks to be complete is a fortchin teller, stan'in' 'long side it. Ye hain't had jest quite all of yer hair to comb sence, hev ye, Mr. Allen? Pity she left ye a scalp lock, fer if ye don't quit yer foolin' with me, it'll be hangin' from my lodge-pole yit."

"Before she took a lock of my hair at the fond parting, Milt, she bade me beware of you after dark. Now if you would make your visits diurnal——." The taunt went unfinished for Milton belied his years and logy bulk in the spirited spring he made for Allen. Cadmus, swift and slippery as the chameleon, darted past him from the corner and brought up at the other end of the room.

Doubly enraged Milton bore down on him again, in a charge like that of a mad bovine, bellowing, "I'm the High Kicker from Maine or the Hollyhock of the river. Once I git holt 'n' they wont be a grease spot left of ye."

"Swing your partners," cried Allen, easily sailing past him again on his approach. "Out with your old guitar, Jim, and I'll call the figures for this dance. First couple round the outside," as he dodged.

"I lay to lam ye right onto that fire if I git holt of ye," cried old Milt, wheeling and wheezing.

"First couple lead up to the right and balance," tormented Allen as he now jigged past him.

Jim took the object of disturbance, the effigy, and threw it into the fire.

"Oh, I'll hurt 'im if I git 'im," wheezed Milt, pausing and addressing Jim.

"'On with the dance!!' Double sachez and the gents outside," called Allen circling around him, for the old Trojan was becoming slow in the fray.

"Ye don't dar' to stan' up 'n' fight me! Ye're a coward!" Milt came to a standstill. "I c'd whup ye blind."

"If you're tired chasin' me around, walk Snowdon up and down for a spell. I'll call for the next set. Let Jim

shake a foot before the dance breaks up," still bantered the irrepressible tormentor.

Old Milt stood shaking with rage. He gave Allen one long, dangerous look, then returned to the rustic chair, puffing from the exercise like a kettle of mush. "Jim, I'd git rid o' that monkey fust thing I done 'fise you," he wheezed. "He'll allus keep ye in trouble."

"What would I do for company?"

"Keep a cat or parrot."

"Say, Milt," said Allen engagingly as he seated himself beside the old man, "let's bury the hatchet. Shake,"—reaching out a hand.

Decidedly and emphatically Milt brought down his fist on his leg, "Never!"

"O, now, see here. I cross my heart I've nothing more up my sleeve for you tonight and the first fine day that comes and we can get away, we'll go to town, have our fortunes told, dine at the Arlington, take in the theatre and——"

"If 'twan't stormin' so like hell, I'd go right back home tonight," broke in Milt. "Yer promises don't go higher 'n the smoke of a puff-ball. Jest when ye're settin' yer stillest is when ye're hatchin' out a brood o' devil's darnin'-needles to sting a feller. I hain't as soft as ye take me. What 'a' ye doin', Jim?"

"Going to make us the best cup of coffee we ever drank."

"Then," said Allen,

" 'We'll all drink together,  
To the gray goose feather,  
And the land where the gray goose flew.' "

"I'll watch my cup so's ye don't slip somethin' into it," vowed Milt.

"After we've drunk, we'll sit around the fire in harmony and sing a 'Come, all ye, and listen to the storm and throw cares to the winds,'" was Allen's next inducement as he strove for peace.

While Jim hustled preparations for coffee and sandwiches, he quoted,

“The night drave on wi’ songs and clatter,  
An’ aye the ale was growin’ better.’”

Cad came after with,

“The storm wi’ out might rair and ristle,  
Tam did nae mind the storm a whistle.’”

And Milt, not to be left,

“Weel mounted on his gray mare Meg,  
A better never lifted leg.’”

“Say, Jim, recite ‘Tam O’Shanter’ while you are brewing. It’ll add flavor,” suggested Cad.

At the suggestion, Jim first drew out coals from the fire on which to set the coffee-pot; then while the brew was boiling and filling the cabin with rich aromatic odor, he recited the celebrated poem with such dramatic force as to call forth from Milt a request for a repetition of the beautiful simile:

“But pleasures are like poppies spread,  
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;  
Or like the snowfall in the river,  
A moment white—then melts forever:  
Or like the borealis race,  
That flit ere you can point the place;  
Or like the rainbow’s lovely form,  
Evanishing amid the storm.”

Milt looked melancholy at the close. “How true that air is. How quick are the pleasures o’ life to speed. Fer instance that feast at the Arlington. Never agin will I have the chance o’ settin’ down to fare like that. An’ with sich a sweet little girl fer a pardner. Though it

was like the fiery furnace for the Hebrew children for her. Hope it's well with her now." And he grew reflective.

Cadmus came forward with an answer. "Yes, it's well with her, Milt, and it's sure to be. Sure as Big Ben stands out there now above the cabin. According to Mademoiselle La Rooche, I am to marry her, then die of hunger and want to make her happy, for she afterwards marries Jim."

Both men looked at him half wonderingly for there was a note of earnestness in his voice.

"Wal, afore she marries ye, I'd advise her to take out a heavy insurance on ye aginst laziness 'n' hard times."

"A cup of coffee will sober him. Gather around the table," ordered James.

"Then put some strong onion draughts on his feet to draw it from his head 'n' put him to bed," said Milt, drawing up to the board. "Mebby by mornin' he'll be rational."

Jim passed Milt a rich cup of coffee.

"Mr. Cobb, we have the foundation of the derrick completed, ready to start the first bent. If this polar blizzard abates, Riley will be here early and we'll have it well up before night."

"Got the bull-wheels up from Comfort yit? Swan, that's good coffee."

"Everything up and on the ground now ready but the cable and drill. Expect them up to-morrow."

"Everything ready to go to work but the spy. S'pose yer uncle furnishes that part. Goin' to make the first well a mystery as they usually do in new territory hain't ye?"

"Have another sandwich, Milt, and let me give you another cup of coffee," was Snowdon's answer.

"B'lieve I will indulge in another cup, thanky."

"Pass me that calamity, Milt, there near you," said Allen, and Milton handed him the dish of baked beans.

"Why hain't ye drinkin' yer coffee?" he inquired, noticing Cad's cup untouched.

"Don't take my own poison when I can get 'round it," returned Allen.



Milt flew back from the table. "There, that accounts fer yer monkeyin' round that coffee-pot when Jim's back was turned!" he frenziedly exclaimed. "I see ye at it. Jim, we'll be deader'n hell 'n less 'n half an hour. I thought I tasted somethin' queer 'bout that coffee. He's pizened us! Only one thing saves us: an' that is to take a vomit!" He leaped up wildly. "Got a stomick pump, Jim? Luke warm water, even, will set us to gaggin' 'n' mebbly we kin raise 'er. If we can't"—turning to Cad a reproachful look—"tell Ibbby I died hard an' to sell the cow an' do the very best she ken with her; carve it on my tombstone, 'Pizened from drink; but praise God 'twan't wood alkyhol.'"

Allen, strangling on his coffee from laughter, was by this time struggling to drink it to mitigate the old man's suffering for Milton by this time was writhing in imaginary agony, believing his call had come.

"He never drinks his coffee till at the finish of the meal. See, he is trying to drink it now," vouchsafed Jim to quiet the old man's fears.

"He'd drink it if no other way was open to kill off all the rest. His life ain't wuth a gnat's egg-shell. What's he care for it so's he lays out somebody what is. If he dies, I hope the right word goes onto his tombstone 'n' that is jest the word '*It*' 'n' no more. 'Here lays *It*,' or 'Here *It* is.'"

By this time Snowdon's laughter was not much lighter than Allen's and Milt began to perceive that he was intended for the butt of ridicule. "B'lieve I'll weather the storm 'n' pike back home while the goin's good. Don't know's I want to go back to the ole woman in a box."

Jim stepped to the door ahead of him and stood with his back against it, arms folded. "Now, Mr. Cobb, I wasn't laughing from choice. Since Allen has broken up the feast in most admired disorder again—he seems to have a mania for it—suppose we bind him and put him under the bed for the remainder of the evening to insure against further disaster. And if he is too noisy with his tongue, give him a gag bit to chew on. No going out in

this storm again tonight, my good man. Why, you would never find your way back and die of exposure. Come back to the table"—taking him by the arm and leading him back—"and we'll finish while Allen keeps silent."

"Yes, you want to stay, Milt; the fun hasn't begun yet. I'm down on the program to hang by the hair of the head from the rafters for four hours before the show is over. After I've gone to sleep that way, Jim cuts me down," was Allen's silence.

"Oh, do keep still, Cad. Your jokes are not popular with us any more, are they, Milt?" said Jim, fearful of some new outbreak.

"Likely's not I'll be obleeged to lick 'im yit afore he'll quiet down. His head is jest like a rattle-box."

Cadmus now rose from the table, sat down by the fire and began whittling at pieces to be used on the unfinished chair.

Milton viewed the work with suspicion. "Startin' in on another Hillside-Mooney, I reckon."

"When you're choking on fried pheasant for breakfast you will feel better toward me," Cad reminded him.

"That's right," said Jim, sitting down between the pair. "Cad keeps us in game all the time so that I don't have to buy much meat. He is an expert with gun and traps and snares. And he can cook game to perfection. Just notice the browned bird when it comes on the table in the morning. My mouth is watering now to think of it."

At the mention of the rare tidbit for breakfast, Milt held his peace. But his grouch was still gnawing at him. Allen, too, relapsed into silence, busy at his work. At his feet lay the dog, his head on his paws, giving jerks now and then, no doubt at game sighted in his dog-dreams. And while the wind roared without, swirling snow down the chimney to spit in the blaze with a witch's spite, James and Milt talked over the morning's plans, Milt occasionally rolling his eyes Allenward not certain but that he might be manufacturing another Hillside-Mooney to shock his serenity after all. When it was time to retire,

gauged by Milton's yawns, Jim sought to pull the bed from the wall and place boxes behind it to widen it sufficiently for the trio. He could do this and make a comparatively easy bed, when pressed by the transient, by heaping old clothing on the boxes, finishing up with extra quilts and sheets.

At the discovery of the make-shift, Milton raised his hand in protest. "Right here in this chair I'll doze in comfort. Throw a quilt over it 'n' fin' me a pillar 'n' I'll sleep sound's a log. No, ye won't nuther take the chair, Jim. It's me fer the chair. Come on with the kiver now 'n' that settles it. Atween naps I'll throw a log onto the fire 'n' 'twon't git cold in the cabin. Man, how I'll sleep!"

"Very thoughtful, Mr. Cobb. I've been worrying all evening over the third bed-fellow," said Allen, ready to roll in.

"You couldn't possibly miss a chance of shootin' yer wad," flung Milt in return as he arranged his roost.

"Peace be over this house of tribulation," laughed Snowdon. "Now I'll put out the clock, wind up the cat and seek my couch of dreams, that is if you fellows can agree in your sleep long enough to give me a nap."

"Remember, Mr. Cobb, if you start up that corrugated tin-ware snore of yours in the night, I'll get up in my sleep and throw you into the fire," was Cadmus's parting injunction, as he rolled over to make room for Jim.

"By the old Leviticus law, if you try it, your next ride'll be to slow music, Mr. Allen," was Milt's good-night benediction.

"Don't you come back to that," Jim warned Cad. "If you do, just to keep up a sparring match all night, I'll get up and heave you out into a snow bank to cool your ardor. Nobody's going to leave here to-night or tomorrow either if I'm forced to do some cuffing to quell this riot."

"Good-night, Milt, and happy dreams on a bedless night," Cad sang out cheerily. Jim quietly reached out and clapped his hand over his mouth.

Milt made no response and soon drifted into slumberland with malice in his heart. He had taken an everlasting dislike to Cad. Cadmus, fully aware of it, sought every advantage to annoy him.

The storm drove on with unabating fury throughout the night, which was eventless save that Milton engaged in a peripatetic march in the darkness, stumbling over the dog and setting him to howling. This aroused the sleepers for a time. Allen inquired of Jim if the cupboard was locked, whereupon Milton drowsily cursed heartily.

The first to awake in the morning was the ever alert Cadmus. It was just faintly breaking day; outlines of objects were barely discernable in the room. He raised his head and looked Milt's way. Quilt around him, blanketed like an Indian, the old man lay back in his chair, his head lolling over like an old hawk stung with shot. Cadmus leaped out of bed with a hoarse cry of alarm. "Morning," he shouted, followed for Milt's benefit by,

" 'Everybody works but father,  
And he sits around all day.' "

Milt and Jim and the dog sprang up. Bustle was the order in the cabin. The wind had fallen, the storm was over and work on the derrick that day would move with a vim. Cad soon had a fire roaring up the chimney and Jim brought more logs from the alley outside to replenish it. Then the small stove was placed on the hearth and filled with coals, more convenient for pancake baking than the open fire. The savory odor of pheasant, roasting in a skillet over coals, with that of coffee had a very mollifying effect on Milt. Cadmus at a hint from Jim was very gracious to the old gentleman who, notwithstanding he kept up the bars between them, grew less testy. While they were eating Jim observed some blue jays near the window hopping about on bushes, perhaps attracted by the smell of food. On the ground fully a foot deep, lay the snow which they defied to drive them

from their northland home. In their bright coats of violet, dove-gray and white with sky-blue crests, the birds, tilting, balancing, bobbing, turning, flitting upward and downward, were a beautiful sight on a winter morning. Jim rose, took a pancake from the table and tore it into bits. Slowly and noiselessly he raised the window far enough to place the food on the outer sill, then lowered the window and took his place again at the table to watch proceedings. Soon he was rewarded for one vain coxcomb, bolder than his associates, flew toward the sill. He lighted on the ledge and peered around a moment as if in uncertainty. He then picked up a morsel and returned to his companions, possibly to communicate the tidings, for he soon returned followed by the whole troupe. They quickly dispatched the proffered delicacy, then flitted back to the ozier bushes to repeat the frolic.

James, motionless, had witnessed the fête enchanted. "The ballet and the banquet of the birds," he commented.

"One's tail is missin'," observed Milt, shoveling pancake with his knife. "Somethin' 's reached for 'im in the survival o' the fittest."

"My feathered neighbors will now visit me every day I am sure."

"Let Lark out 'n' you'll see 'em skite," counseled Milt.

"The spirit that will protect and care for a bird or a flower is a safe one," returned Jim.

"Some see only the beauties o' nature while others see only use. I only see the use," said Milt in defense, supping coffee from his saucer.

"Use is it that you see in the Hillside-Mooney?" Allen exploded. "He's a freak work of nature but nature he is. What's his use?"

Milt raised his cup to throw it but the day was saved by the sudden opening of the door and the timely and precipitate advent of Riley Henshaw.

"Sun's goin' to shine an' take off the snow an' we'll make that old derrick walk up today," were Riley's words in glowing anticipation of the enterprise as he partook of such of the breakfast as was left, while Jim

and Cad hustled around, setting the cabin in order and gathering up tools.

Soon they set forth down the road toward Comfort. In possibly half a mile they came to the oil well site. The foundation for the derrick had been previously completed. The task now was to run up the derrick. First the snow was removed from the tops of lumber piles. On James devolved the laying out of the frame, the measuring and marking, while the others kept saws busy. In a short time lumber was cut for the first bent. As that rose with hammer accompaniments to the whistling, singing, and laughter of the party, the Barrens rang with the echoes. Even the dog entered into the spirit of the gaiety and at all times could be heard his sharp bark in the bushes as he sighted or started game. Before the second bent was finished that forenoon, to old Milt, Cadmus had become a wonder. Nimble and adroit, he climbed and gamboled high in the air like a squirrel. Leaping and springing, he caught board and tools with the dexterity of a trapeze performer. It was clear now to Milt why James so cleaved to him: he was an expert worker, bubbling over with good humor, ready to do or die.

Long before the close of the second day's work, the derrick, nine bents, seventy-two feet high, stood completed and was viewed by the rustics of Nubbin Ridge from afar as the hope of the hills. Cad and Riley had finished the crown ready for the pulley, which was not to go up till the next morning. They had been sitting for some time viewing the country, which seemed entirely new from that high elevation, with a pair of field glasses which Cad had taken up for the express purpose. Riley was holding the glasses when something unusual arrested his attention.

"Jim, come up here, quick, an' see what I've discovered," he called down to Snowdon as he lowered the optics. "Company for you already."

James and Milt were working at the foot of the derrick when the call came. There was something in Riley's voice that portended grave discovery. James left his work on the instant and hurriedly climbed aloft. Cad descend-

ed the ladder a short distance and perched in the top of the derrick to make room for him when he came up. As James seated himself, Riley handed him the glasses and pointed out the place of interest. It was a huge rock standing on the steep side of the opposite hill, not a great distance by air line, but a long way if reached by descending into the gulch and climbing again. Seen with the naked eye, two black objects were faintly discernible on top of the rock.

“Whew!” exclaimed James as he brought the lenses to a focus. “According me an early signal for trouble.”

“Know the parties?” inquired Riley.

“Very well,” replied Snowdon as he returned the glasses and began the descent.

“Who was it?” asked Cad of Riley as they started to follow down.

“His uncle, John Snowdon, and Hannibal Hayhow.”

“They may make him some trouble later but let them ‘beware the fury of a patient man’” was Cad’s proud boast in the prowess of Snowdon.

## XIV

### THE SCHOOL, THE WHISTLER AND THE STORM

Christmas was near and the spirit of it was running rampant on Nubbin Ridge. The Nubbin Ridge people could never recall any feeling so feverish in the history of the place. Not a soul from the oldest inhabitant, Uncle Ned Podge, who could light ninety-seven candles on his birthday cake, down to the youngest but was surcharged to the bursting point with the glowing anticipation of the festivities to be "pulled off" at the schoolhouse, Christmas Eve. The merry stir in the air began to grow from the time it was announced in Sunday-School by the Widow Wiggins, the salient superintendent with tongue like a rapier, that Elder Wilder, the tramp preacher, and Cadmus Allen of the Barrens would deliver able addresses. At the promise of the appearance of Cadmus in public, the younger set went wild; and gradually the elders, who first looked upon his promised effort with misgivings, leaped the fence after them. Then there was to be a real Santa Claus this year—another thrilling innovation. And the superintendent never failed to announce in meetings that she would make the opening prayer. That meant a currying of all evil doers. Miss Arabella Blodgett, the school-teacher, an old maid of spare frame, "sharper than a bag of augers" to quote Milt Cobb, took the training of the performers "in hand." Last, but far from least, Jerushy Henshaw was to preside at her own wheezy, little cottage organ which she had generously proffered, thus innocently spelling murder for the music.

Cad's prominence among them was due to the fact that for some time back he had been a regular attendant at Sabbath-School, always in company on Sundays with Riley Henshaw, now a boon companion, and their regularity and interest had brought in other young men. The day



he came home flushed with prominence and announced his enviable part in the programme, the conservative James was seized with serious but silent apprehension. Cadmus was erratic. Where might the path of glory lead? James had just returned from Comfort, four miles away, where, when weather permitted, he attended the Presbyterian Church and Sabbath-School—the creed of his fathers. Too far for Cadmus. Not he. So James was pleased when Cadmus united in Sunday worship with the Nubbin Ridge people at the schoolhouse. But as to an address—James turned his head and gasped.

A heavy snow was retarding work on the well. They had spudded down to the bed-rock but were now waiting for a thaw. James did not care to drill too fast. Spring would be soon enough to finish the well and unleash the dogs of war. Meanwhile the wait would afford Cad leisure to compose and rehearse his Christmas number.

Cadmus began at once to burn midnight oil, grinding out his composition. So intensely did he cleave to the work that James sometimes chided him soundly and warned him not to delve too deeply into the subject matter for his brain might not stand the strain and sickness or insanity might ensue. Scribble, scribble, scratch and erase, whispers or audible mutters, the work went on and Jim grew more and more curious to know the trend of the remarks. But Cadmus shunned his confidence. Sometimes, however, he would rouse James out of a sound sleep to discuss some ornate figure of speech; and when asleep and dreaming, he would often toss and thrash about in the throes of delivery of pathetic eloquence. “Who kindled the fires of freedom? Who weltered in their gore at Bunker Hill that freedom might live? Who carried the flag into the jaws of the British lion in 1779?” And James would wonder how historical eulogy was going to fit into a Christmas address.

When at last it was finished and committed, Cadmus would stand in divers places to rehearse. Sometimes from the roof of the engine-house he would “spout” an unintelligible flow of soul; then again he would pose on Big Ben and with outstretched arms address himself to the clouds,

the trees or the derrick. One day when he was out practicing as usual, James chanced to discover his manuscript lying on the table, left there by accident, and stole a glance at the subject. It was "Corn-Cobs." A further glance proved that the citizens of Nubbin Ridge, were categorized therein as "corn-crackers." Snowdon fell across the bed, limp and helpless in a fit of laughter. As he lay there laboring in nothing short of agony, from the top of Big Ben outside came the shout of "O, King, live forever!" It was now clear that Mr. Allen was practicing subterfuge. None of the utterances that he was shouting within hearing would be given in the speech on Christmas Eve. But a criticism might upset the whole kettle of sweets for in literary matters Allen was obdurate. James chose not to meddle and let the speaker take the consequences. He slipped out doors and into the woods, there to remain long enough for Allen to make the recovery of his paper and still hold the opinion that he was guarding a secret.

The next morning, Allen started away from the cabin at a very early hour for singing practice at the Nubbin Ridge schoolhouse. All the minstrels in the exercises were expected to be there at 8.30 sharp and vocalize the half hour before school-time. Cad arrived as per schedule as did the others and very soon they were lined up in front rendering "Beautiful Star of Bethlehem," led by Miss Arabella by virtue of her superior musical education. Miss Arabella, standing apart from the other singers, book in one hand, hickory pointer in the other, beat the time right through and kept it with her head. She was tall, angular and inflexible—school-teacher written on every point and feature—and her voice broke sharply like a cracked bell. She bore wide reputation for hand discipline, which was confirmed when Cad would observe urchins occasionally dropping in noiselessly and stealthily taking their seats, there to sit as immovable as wooden pegs. To Riley's amusement, she was taking a great "shine" to Cad, forgetting her years and becoming quite tittery, the poppin-jay encouraging her. Nothing would satisfy when 9.00 o'clock came and the singers disbanded, but that he and Mr. Henshaw remain for the morning

session of school. "Mr. Cadmus Allen of the Barrens" acquiesced, but duty called Riley away.

The tocsin sounded and Miss Arabella's day began. After the motley shavers had taken their seats, her first move was to snap her fingers. This meant to "sit up straight" with folded arms. The signal was universally respected. Cad observed they were a cowed group and he pitied them. Miss Arabella read from the Scriptures in her cold, cracked voice but Allen was positive her pupils were not listening from the way they kept rolling their eyes toward him. When Miss Arabella finished her reading, down on her knees she went beside her chair and likewise down went the whole school, their faces impish as they disappeared below the desks. This was their time for relaxation and fun, it seemed. Cad sat with bowed head and listened. From a couple of seats ahead of him, came smothered snickers, followed soon by a loud bursting snort! The prayer came to an abrupt end and Miss Arabella was on her feet! Heads peeped up, then drew down again. "You may rise," she said, her face scarlet. Back to the seat from whence the laughing came she sailed in battle array. Two small boys were the culprits. She collared them, marched them to the front and stood them on the rostrum. Both were sniveling from fright, anticipating a sound beating. Miss Arabella stepped back and stood looking at them, her face now a deathly palor, too amazed and too full for utterance.

"Teacher, he m-m-m-made me laugh 'bout what he said 'bout you," came the confession from the larger of the pair, turning states evidence in hopes of saving his own jacket.

The leader of the rebellion now stood alone, trying to blink the tears away in a vain effort at bravery. He was a freckle-faced little boy, shabbily dressed with shoes several sizes too large for him. Miss Arabella's eyes shot lightning as she reached for the birch of correction that lay on her desk. "What did he say?" she demanded in ripping tones as she turned to the witness and took the offender by the hand, ready for action.

"W'y, he said,

'As Miss Blodgett went to say her prayers,  
A little mouse ran down the stairs.'"

The irresistible laughter that rose from all quarters of the room at the unexpected, had the effect of halting the stern executioner. She looked over the room at what seemed a sea of insubordination, humiliated, she felt, in the sight of the visitor, and her face turned red again as live coals. The boys in the seat behind Cad's back began to stir.

"Ted 'll git beat up good an' proper this time for his po'try that he's pulled off on the old girl," one whispered.

"Ef he'd jest right up a say now to the old pullet, 'Thou art like unto a flower,' she'd tone right down an' lay up her whip an' kiss 'im prob'ly."

Arabella turned on the boy again, but it struck her that the offence was so enormous it merited slow torture. She dropped his hand to think of a way to grill him, but held him with caustic look as she devised. Nothing could be heard in the room but the ticking of the clock.

While the lad was waiting doom, he turned shamefacedly toward Cad a round roguish face, brimming over with good humor and with no trace of badness. The clear-cut features were keen with intelligence, an intelligence that had got him into trouble. He had dried his tears and was smiling and the smile was humor itself. Allen's heart was aching for him and the smile that he returned said: "Be brave, little fellow!"

"Gosh, I feel sorry for Ted!" came again from behind Allen's back. "Hain't got no mother an' his old man jest makes the flesh fly when he licks 'im. I got a big biscuit in my pail to give 'im at noon."

"I've got a piece o' sweet-cake for 'im today," whispered the other.

That settled it for the emotional Allen. Ted was a favorite among his companions. He had no mother and a father that beat him. But how to dislodge Miss Arabella!

She now acquitted the witness, and with hanging head

he slunk back to his seat while she turned to the convicted to pronounce sentence. Her voice was ominous as she preferred the charge: "Ted Atwater, you are incorrigible and a constant menace to the good order and welfare of the Nubbin Ridge School. You are beset with the nefarious habit of composing doggerel verse and employing it to burlesque school government, a habit that inspires the other pupils to become refractory. This morning, you have desecrated the period for devotional exercises, and now you are about to pay the penalty.

"But 'The quality of mercy is not strained,'" continued Miss Arabella. "Thus I will afford you an opportunity to escape punishment in this way. If you compose a verse on the same subject and repeat it within one minute, you shall receive only a severe reprimand."

She raised the whip above him and in that precarious attitude stood watching the second hand of the clock. And the boy stood watching the whip.

"She's givin' him a William Tell chance to escape," came from behind Cad's ear and Cad was watching, breathless. "Ef she licks 'im onreasonable, I'm jist a goin' to peel my coat an' goin' up an' hand her a Jack Dempsey right between the eyes. I can lick any womern in Sal King Township!"

"Me, too," reiterated his satellite. "That kid that squealed on 'im is goin' to git it at recess."

The time was ripe for the drop of Damocles' sword. The boy still said nothing and down came the gad with a swish. But the budding poet, with unbelievable agility sprang back in time to escape the cut and in that spring sang out merrily,

"Here I stand before Miss Blodgett,  
She's goin' to strike but I'm goin' to dodge it."

The yell that rose this time was deafening. Arabella had lost ground. Ted had come through with pennant flying. Even cheers went up as Miss Arabella stood by, defeated. Was the iron grasp by which she held the Nubbin Ridge School, slipping? In Cad's struggle to

restrain from laughing in her humiliated presence, tears ran down his cheeks.

"You may take your seat, Ted Atwater," Arabella weakly said as she wanly sank down on a chair. Then she imploringly looked at Cad. "Mr. Allen, what's the remedy?"

"Pray with their heads above board, I would suggest, Miss Blodgett," he respectfully answered.

"But I'm—a Methodist," faltered Miss Blodgett.

"An most of us kids are Presbyterians an' can't go the knee action," piped one of the urchins sitting behind Cad, emboldened to change the old order.

Miss Arabella sat overwhelmed. Cad rose to the rescue.

"Miss Blodgett, I would further suggest that you proceed now with the regular routine of work as though nothing had happened. Clouds always pass away and this will soon blow over. Go right on——"

"Mention it to 'er to limber up a little on her civics, will you, while yer usin' salve, Mr. Cad," came a voice from behind. "She's lickin' us and keepin' us in cuz we can't learn by heart the clean-up chapter."

"I will not stand this any longer," vehemently cried Miss Arabella springing up and seizing a ruler, fired by the spread of insurrection that was threatening her realm. "Pupils will never talk to me like that"—and she started on a campaign to quell the rumblings of uprising. In a hurried march, she made straight for the young rebel who sat behind Cad, but he assumed that a good run was better than a poor stand and was making a spirited dash for the door when a loud rap outside halted him and brought the house to order. As the fugitive stole back to his seat, his pursuer dropped the ruler on a desk and proceeded, troubled but desperate, to the door. Crabapple Jones, the local member of the Board of Education of Sal King Township, had arrived.

Now this opportune morning visit of Mr. Jones was purely official. He had appeared on an important but delicate mission. As is commonly the case among school children, an infectious skin disease had made its appear-

ance on Nubbin Ridge and the good dames of the Ridge were waxing warm over the rumor that pupils who were "scratchin' an' diggin'" were allowed to attend school and spread the complaint. A report to the Board had results. Jones, a prominent figure of that august body, was authorized to investigate and dispense with the ticklish affair. So Miss Arabella, aware of his purpose, piloted him to the rostrum, and seated him in state. A death-like hush prevailed. Perhaps he had descended on them further to encourage Arabella in a more stringent course of flagellation, was their thought. Miss Arabella first held a whispered consultation with the worthy official, then he rose to a point of duty. Clutching hold of a chair-back he peered down over them. They slipped even lower in their seats. After a violent clearing of the throat, Mr. Jones began, with an occasional halt in his address to impress them with profundity:

"Scholars and friends of edgeucation (meaning Cad) of the Nubbin Ridge School District of the Great Commonwealth of Pennsylvania: After havin' greatness thrust upon me by the voters of Sal King Township, I am before ye this mornin' to carry out the trust of a long-sufferin' people. I am creditably informed that the itch has broke out among ye. Our first great epidemic was measles in the fall. But this seems a deeper sorrow. I am here this mornin' to weigh it in all its aspects (they looked for his scales and drew down again). Now how many of ye have the itch? Come raise yer hands." And he raised his own to lead them. "Don't be back'ard 'bout it now. Up with yer hands. See here, now, if ye don't raise yer hands, I'll appint the teacher here to look ye over."

"I have observed thirteen infected," said Miss Arabella with pursed lips.

"Thirteen," repeated Crab-apple dropping his hand. "How many are on the roll?"—turning to Miss Arabella.

"Twenty-three."

"See, that leaves—that leaves——"

"Twelve not affected yet," snapped Miss Arabella.

"Yes twelve. Thirteen got it an' twelve hain't got it, yit. The itch side is the strongest. Lemme see—lemme

see. Now all ye that hain't got the itch may put on yer things an' go home. Ye are outnumbered by one and majority rules—must rule—ever will rule. To ye that are to remain ye are forchinate, indeed, in scorin' a majority. It leaves ye the field. It affords ye a great oppertunity in gittin' an edgeucation over them that are less forchinit. An' so it is always along the stony pathway o' life, my young fr'en's. What appears to us at first as pesterin' as itch or the measles, is sure to turn out a blessin' in disguise. Without prejudice, I have decided today atween the tribes at war an' feel I've done my duty in the exercise thereof. An' now ye who are under a ban an' about to disperse, go forth with my deepest sorrer. But should ye break out with the pesky disease come back an' line in with the lucky. And ye who are to remain, I exhort you to persevere. An' if I was your teacher I would be severe an' make ye purr if ye ever went below one word in spellin'. Spellin' is the bulwark o' the nation——”

He was talking yet when Cad quietly rose, bowed an adieu to the horrified Miss Arabella and tip-toed from the room. When the whistles over the country blew noon, Crab-apple was still haranguing the children, exhorting them to lead useful lives; stick to the Ridge and raise long ears of corn where their ignorant ancestors had raised only nubbins, for such a grand and glorious work would change the name of Nubbin Ridge to something like a full ear and create a better impression beyond the Ridge. Miss Arabella had her resignation ready and presented it to him when he closed. He deplored the act, but she was obdurate and joined the exodus of the healthy as they jubilantly departed. Thus on that eventful morning, Miss Blodgett ended a career of contrarities on Nubbin Ridge. Stilled was the daily hum in the corn-cob hive of erudition till the Monday following New Year's when a new pedagogue, Solon Cipher, entered upon his duties therein.

What of Cadmus? From the schoolhouse he loped across the road and struck into the red-brush, homeward bound. That last look of the sorely tried Arabella noth-



ing could ever efface from his memory. Consigned to work among lepers she afterwards reported. To old Jones, lathy, wizzened, raving in his platitudinous talk, no cartoons could do justice! and Ted Atwater! Allen quickened his run down the slope, now growing steep, to tell Jim of little Ted. There was something remarkable about the boy, he felt; something extraordinary. He was positive Jim would become interested in his welfare. As he came down the steep hill through laurel tangle to the accustomed place of crossing Hazel Fork, he knelt down on the mossy stones to quench his thirst. It was in a deep dell, dark with hemlocks, where the waters of many brooks from the rocky hillsides joined on their way to the river. Here the converging deep depressions of the region rendered it strangely adapted to reflect sounds. The vibratory notes of a hermit-thrush caught Cad's ear as he drank. It was a strange time of year for songs of wood birds and he raised his head to listen. An auricular deception he thought, remembering the bird sings rarely later than August in northern climes. Again it came as if from nowhere and Cad rose to his feet. And now it was followed by the liquid whistle of the oriole from a direction that was also vague. Had he been wafted into an Elysium of heavenly bird songs? Yet the song bore sound curiously akin to human imitation. Soon his muse was broken by a ringing boyish laugh as musical as the bogus carols. Cad wished to meet the owner of the voice and called several times, but his efforts were rewarded only by a mocking laugh, each time from an indeterminate direction.

"Just show me a wing or a foot, ye human warbler of the dales, and I'll go on my way satisfied," called Cad, reluctant to give it up.

His entreaty was rewarded by neither sight nor further sound; so after crossing the brook, he started up the steep hillside in wonderment. This new country to him was a land of strange sights, strange sounds, strange happenings. As he ascended the hill, the dense growth of woods gave way to bushes and rocks and when he gained the summit, he could see the smoke ascending from the cabin at Hermit

Spring on the next ridge. A strong wind was driving a huge, dark mass of clouds from the north and a snow-storm was imminent. Even before he reached the bottom of the intervening gulf, the clouds let loose a fury of snowflakes so thick that Allen could only pursue his way by knowledge of the country, and even this was growing uncertain. Once down at the bottom of the gulch, just ready to begin the ascent for home, he paused, baffled. He could not move in the thick whiteness.

“‘Found buried in white,’ will be the sad message they get at home when I am found next spring in the hills,” he said aloud to himself as he shook the snow from his head and shoulders, buttoned his coat-collar more tightly and boldly struck out for higher territory, uncertain of his bearings.

“Come, own up, Allen, you’re lost,” he again said to himself after a time, sitting down on a log to rest, for traveling was becoming arduous and slow as the snow deepened on the steep hillside. “And right here in stone’s throw of Hermit Spring. Never in my life before did I see the white come down as it’s coming now. This is worse than being lost on the prairie for there you can navigate. The earth is under your feet there instead of its being in your face as it is here in these bloomin’ hills. Well, sing, Allen.”

Bravely he began to sing “Tipperary,” drawing out, “’Tis a long way to go” into a dismal howl, an outlet to his reckless defiance of the storm. He could not look up, for the flakes, and so sat singing the lyric with head hung nearly between his knees, lost on the Barrens!

“Indians never get lost, never freeze,” he mused at length, lifting his head and trying to penetrate the curtain of snow and get a sight of the hill. “Wonder if the top is stickin’ out yet.” After a short distance of labored upgrade, a young hemlock, its thick green branches drooping heavily under the weight of snow, offered him temporary shelter; and carefully crawling under the friendly canopy, so as not to shake down the load upon him, he sat down a second time for a rest. The ground was yet

comparatively bare in the retreat, and it proved a God-given haven for the time being.

"We are thankful for this favor of a roost," he muttered as he shook his cap and brushed the damp snow from his heavily-coated clothing. But the smile he attempted was somewhat inept. He looked at his watch. "Getting long towards noon and I'm hungrier than a fasted bear. If 'twasn't for that I'd hibernate here till the spew is over. Don't like the sound of my own voice but poor company is better than none. Well! Well!"—as he peered out and got a glimpse of the almost perpendicular incline that he must mount. "Reason a bit, Mr. Cadmus C. Allen, late of the great State of Oklahoma, Pawnee County, U. S. A., before you hit the uncertain trail: First, you're in the woods on the hills and out in squally weather; the next lamentable fact, you're lost from the established crossing between Nubbin Ridge and Hermit Spring; whether you are east or west of that beaten track is mad speculation. When the mind is lost, the right peg out-travels the left because of its superstrength; that gets me to cutting circles; but I can overcome that pickle by taking every step for highest ground possible; that is bound to bring me to the top of the ridge, all things favorable; once there, and the least bit of a lull in the deposit, I can locate myself." Thus saying, he pulled up his leggins, buckled them tighter, then crept out of the covert and started a new line of attack.

His strength and agility, aided by his ready valor in overcoming obstacles, told well as he made perceptible progress up the steep in the face of the blinding blanket of white. This, however, in a short time began to grow thinner and he knew the storm was abating. His hopes rose. High up the hill, a ledge of rocks, running along the side, rose in a formidable barrier across the way. Great gray crags, heaps upon heaps, reared their heads against the sky which had cleared before he came up to the stone-crop.

"Don't b'lieve I'll 'tend school very regular this winter if my first day is like those to follow," he said as he laid his hand against the side of a rock, unusually high Jim's fence to crawl through. Don't remember ever

being on this side of it before. It's a good one and when I find a gap an' get through, I trust he'll open a tin can of peaches in honor of my home-coming."

He ran an eye along the base of the ramparts and discovered what appeared to be an opening some distance to the left. Snow-trudging was light work now as he hurried to scrutinize the breach in hopes of a passage. A narrow defile, a rock fissure formed by the disintegrating upheaval of the earth's primeval crust, offered penetration for some distance, when it came to an abrupt end. High on every side rose forbidding walls. He began a search for some place to climb rather than retrace his way. Nothing presented itself save an old, charred, pine log-top with projecting knots that stood leaning against a rock and afforded a ladder up to what appeared to be a terrace above, a matter of twenty feet. To this elevation he easily climbed—a rock plateau—and walked to the end, where he leaped across a chasm to another rock which proved to be the last high one in the great divide. This sloped to the ground. It would be rather steep to walk down but he resolved to hazard a trial. Selecting a place that appeared to be the smoothest slide in case he should be forced to make the descent in that fashion, he paused on the brink before taking the first step. There might be hidden rocks below, but he depended on the deep bed of snow to break the contact.

"No skis, no sledge have I," he said, "to help me in my downward plunge from Alpine heights but here I break away." And he started. After taking several giddy steps, he unavoidably sat down. It might have been a drop that he took, so swift was the flying trip ploughing a deep furrow as he cascaded. With a soft thud he landed in a stone pit. The matted rocks did not give him much jar when he struck and all would have been well had his head not hit a jutting spur. He sank limply into the deep snow, his head thrown back, resting against a snow-mantled rock, drops of blood trickling from a contusion on his forehead. And very white was his uplifted face while Jim waited dinner in the cabin.

## XV

### WHEREIN JAMES MAKES TWO DISCOVERIES

One o'clock. Jim rose from his seat by the fire. Nothing strange in Cad's remaining away for such a length of time; he might have gone home with Riley from the rehearsal. Snowdon strove to reason, but forebodings kept sailing like storm clouds above the horizon of his thought. He struggled to tell himself he was fear-foolish. But the dog, too, he noticed was uneasy. Through the window he could see him sitting on a stump, the accustomed place where he was wont to wait and watch for Cad's return when he was away; but twice within the last few minutes the dog had lifted his head and drawn long, dismal howls. Was there such a thing as animal premonition of disaster? It was a harrowing thought that would not be brushed aside. After making the fire safe, he donned coat and cap and strode out, determined to take the hidden trail for Nubbin Ridge, no longer able to endure the oppression of growing fears. Emerging into the clearing below him a small boy, poorly clad, was floundering up the path toward him. The dog gave a warning bark.

"Be quiet, Lark," said Jim, stroking the silken hair of the faithful fellow. "Maybe he brings us news of Cad." At the mention of Cad, the dog leaped down and bounded around him, the while wagging his tail and keeping up a pitiful whine.

"Whom have we here, little man?" asked Jim as the boy came laboring up, quite out of breath.

"Ted Atwater," was the heroic reply, "an' I've come to live with you and Mr. Cad."

"When do your trunks arrive?" laughed Jim.

"B'lieve me, all I own is on my back. But I can work. You keep house an' I know how to make soft soap. 'N' I can watch the oil well nights for I heerd they was goin'

to sneak on you. O, hain't this a dandy dog!"—as Lark placed his paws on his shoulders, looking into his face and wagging his tail to seal a friendship.

"Where do you live?" asked Jim.

"Live? Not much of a life you'd think. That is, I hain't died yit over down on Nubbin Ridge. Mr. Cad come yit?"

"Cad. No. Did you see him today?"

"W'y, yes. Hain't he home yit? He crossed Hazel Fork before it snowed. I seen him ahead of me but lost him when the storm came on; an' hain't he got home yit?"

Back down the snowy way he had just traversed by the hardest effort, the little lad turned a troubled gaze. He had expected Cad to be there ahead and espouse his plea for adoption into the Hermit Spring circle, for he was sure that he had captivated Cad during the morning exercises at the schoolhouse. And now Cad was not there and lost!

James felt easier. Allen was located. But why lost in the hills he had learned so well on his hunting excursions? Sombre echoes came up from the murmuring hemlocks below responsive to Snowdon's loud call. And these were the only sounds that came back.

"Laddie, you go into the cabin and eat the dinner that is waiting for Cad. Dry your clothes and if I hav'n't found him by that time I may need you. Hear me?"

"Yes, Mr. Jim," answered the hungry urchin, almost with reverence. James' eyes followed him till the door closed after him. His coarse, cheap clothes, not even patched, bore the evidence of abject poverty and lack of care.

"It's a hard heart which has no opening door for some dead mother's hungry and heart-starved boy. Come here, Lark. Hop up on the stump now." He pointed the place and the dog instantly obeyed the order. James put one arm around his neck and pointed again in the direction in which the dog had watched Cad go. "Where's Cad? Dear old Cad?" The dog listened, his ears pointing the direction, his feet and tail furiously patting the stump.

waiting the order to go. "Now, Cad's lost, old fellow. We must go find Cad."

Like an arrow, the faithful collie cleaved the air in a graceful leap, wild for the search. To him had now come the call of the wild moors and highlands where his ancestors had hunted strays from the flock and guided shepherds and sheep through the raging blizzard safely back to the fold. It was the first potent call of the heath in his blood. Quickly he disappeared over the billows of snow, down, on down the hillside, his cry coming back fainter and fainter. Jim lunged after him, a bit top-heavy in the main-sails.

When no sound from the dog came back, Snowdon stopped and listened. Only the mockery of the winds broke the solemn stillness. He mounted a rock and called; then listened. His cry was answered by crows; their caws in noisy conclave came from somewhere far around the hill. The collie now returned from a fruitless search with lolling tongue and quick panting breath and threw himself down in the snow at Jim's feet; but the look of the dog as he gazed wistfully up was not that of defeat. He kept turning his head in various directions, listening and scenting, perking up first one ear and then the other. Brief was his rest, and then up and away he bounded in the direction from which came the disturbed cries of the crows. Jim remembering that crows congregate over anything unusual in the woods, plunged after the dog with renewed strength. Across ravines, up and down steep slopes, through rocky defiles and over ways precarious to the feet, Lark led on, but he gained fast in the lead and was soon out of hearing.

Jim had come to the ledge which Cad had crossed and, exhausted, he sat down on a boulder for a brief rest and began to ponder with care-wrung face. Before long came a long-drawn howl which he knew to be the dismal cry of the collie of the highlands at the end of a quest disclosing tragedy. Remembering his parting injunction to Ted, he took the gun slung from his shoulder and fired three successive volleys, the shots reverberating in the hills. If the boy heard he would come. With new and desperate

strength he took up the trail. Strange thoughts passed through his mind in kaleidoscopic turns. At the thought of the worst his throat tightened. His pal! surely, he felt, nothing had invoked God's wrath on the mirth-loving boy, whose gifts only mature years would bring to fruition. Then his lips parted, yielded to the inner tide, and he prayed: "O, God, the Creator and Guiding Spirit in the wisdom of Thy perfect and wondrous plan of which the wisest can but surmise, spare this boy at this time that he may yet do the work in life that Thou didst forecast him to fulfill when Thou didst bestow on him many talents for Thy purpose. And if he has willfully buried talent, I beseech Thee, Father, grant him yet another chance to fulfill Thy pleasure in a longer, useful life. Now if my weak prayer is gone amiss and he be early called to account for his stewardship, then, Lord, I implore Thee, to have compassion on his soul"—this just as he reached the verge of the rocky pit and gazed below. "Great heaven!"

Cad's form had not moved from the sitting posture. His body still rested against the buttressed stones in the wall of the cavity; his head was thrown back, the eyes wide and fixed in their stare. The dog, standing on his hind feet with forepaws over the sleeper's shoulders, on Snowdon's approach uttered a doleful wail of brute misery.

Resolute courage swept away Snowdon's grief and fear as he dropped into the hole. "Down, Lark, old fellow!" he commanded. The dog instantly obeyed with a piteous whine that implored help. As Jim grasped the seemingly lifeless form by the shoulders and lifted Cad to his feet, he noticed how limp the body was. The bruise on the forehead told the story. Holding him up with one arm, he began to rub his face vigorously with snow and soon was rewarded by a faint twitching of the muscles. From off in the woods now came a sharp whistle. It was the boy seeking a guiding sound to the place. Jim shrilled a piercing return which must have stirred Cad's senses for his limbs gave a perceptible start at the noise. Jim's joy at this proof of returning consciousness knew no bounds.

Down to the rim of the hole of trouble, wallowed Ted



Atwater. "Holy poker!" he cried, tumbling in. "Is the poor gink gone?" Tears began to roll down his cheeks. "You won't 'dopt me if he is, an' I can't stan' guard at the well then."

"Don't stop to worry about that now, Ted. Just help get him up out of here." But Snowdon could not repress a smile at the lad, clad now in his own overcoat and top-boots which somewhat encumbered his movements. "Warm, Ted, and dry?"

"I'd think I was in heaven if I wasn't in this hole; and Mr. Cad—" was Ted's exultant answer as he caught hold of Cad's legs to lift him.

Cad was now gasping for breath and the dog was bounding around and barking from joy. Jim, half way up to the top with his burden, now paused for rest, holding to a root for support. "Get to the top, Ted, and pull somewhere as we come up," he commanded.

"G—d, but you're stouter'n a bull elephant!" exclaimed the boy.

"Won't adopt boys that swear," cautioned Jim, heaving to for the last raise. "Catch hold of that bush with one hand and lend me the other."

"Hell of a hole, wasn't it, for a man to fall into?"

"Yes, but your ornaments of speech are badly chosen, my boy. Pull off your overcoat and lay it on the snow that I may put him down. I'll give you the one I have on."

"Bees—buzzing—" murmured Cad faintly as Jim was laying him down on the coat.

"He got a crack right on the bean that fixed him," said Ted.

"Water—falling—" faintly continued Cad as he struggled to rise.

"Hike for the cabin, now, Ted. Build up a big fire and put all the water to heat that you can get on. On the top shelf in the cabinet, you will find a bottle of camphor. Bring that back to me. By the way you came, how far do you reckon we are from the cabin? I will have to carry Cad and you meet me as soon as possible."

“God—Godfrey I mean, much as a mile I should think. You never can lubber him in alone.”

“Hike now before you swear again”—and the boy was off.

“It snowed, didn’t it?” was Cad’s first coherent speech. Slowly he came out of oblivion, strangely bewildered as he continued to thrash around on the coat in attempts to rise.

“Lie still, Cad, till I get full steam up. Got to move you pretty soon or you’ll freeze. Growing colder. Stop, Lark!”—to the dog that would fawn over his master despite all Jim’s efforts to keep him brushed aside.

Cad reached out for the dog till his arm encircled his neck. “Dear old Lark, you may lick me. How—where—when—?”

“He saved your life, Cad—he and the crows.”

Cad grew thoughtful as he hugged the dog. “Queer sights and sounds, Jim, go shooting and thumping through my head. Stinging pains. Where are we?”

“Out here in the woods. You got snowbound coming back from Nubbin Ridge; got into a hole and got your head bumped falling in. Lark and I found you. Now, I’ll get you onto my back and you ride into camp.”

“Nope! Don’t propose to risk myself on the back of such a fractious steed. I’ll die right out here in the bush before I’ll go back mounted.”

Jim grasped him in his arms. Cad struggled but Snowdon held him as if he were a kitten and started.

“You’re leavin’ your overcoat on the ground,” remonstrated Cad, resigning himself helplessly to the manner of travel.

“Our adopted son will come back for that.”

“Who?”

“Ted Atwater. Followed you home. I sent him to the cabin.”

“Now that accounts for the birds and the laughing that I heard down where the waters meet.”

“Another biff on your cranium would set you to hearing harps.”

"Honest, Jim. Wait till you hear that kid. He's a wonder."

"He's a little de'il. Wants to be grafted onto the Barrens. How could I live with a pair when one is more than I can carry?"

"Tired, Jim?"

"Tired! Who wouldn't be tired packin' a big elephant like you over the hills? If you'd ride on my back I could travel easier."

"You might kick up."

"Down you go till I rest. Then you'll try the saddle, old man."

Whereupon Jim kicked the snow from a log and seated him. "What's the bird?" he said, pointing to a bush just in front of him.

There, perched on a limb as if unconscious of their approach, sat an owlet scarce larger than a robin, the pigmy of the *strix* family. Wall-eyed, the bird was looking straight ahead past Cadmus, much the same as if he were not there. The round, cat-like head was drawn down among the feathers.

"Frozen stiff," said Jim as he moved cautiously up to it. After regarding the apparently lifeless fixture a moment, he reached and broke a slender twig. This he slowly poked toward the creature's eye and when seemingly the stick was near enough to touch the eye-ball, away darted the bird.

"Never moved an eye," said Cad.

"Owls can't move their eyes," returned Jim, more versed in ornithology. "Have to move the whole head to get a change of vision."

"I swear, I believe my head is growing so ca'm now I can be trusted to walk into camp with a crafty guide to steer me clear of holes and rocks. Here goes."

He rose like one, tipsy. Jim caught him in time to save him from falling and it was slow progress they made, Cad reeling and tottering, Jim with difficulty steadying him and trying to keep him in the tracks made by Ted. The trail zig-zagged but fortunately the way was not steep. For Cad, it was arduous. After a short distance

had been covered, Jim leaned him up against a tree to rest.

"I think from this day on, I'll always be insane," he said. "My head spins round like the bull-wheels in the derrick when they drop the tools. Hark! 'Tis the lark! There I told you how queerly I see and hear: A lark singing on the Barrens in winter time! Go crazy, Jim, and hear the bird pour it out just as he does when flitting about on bush and flower on a dewy June morning!"

"I, too, am mad, for I hear the meadow lark as he poises over the moors."

Jim Snowdon stood spellbound while the music flooded the dreary woodland.

"Ha! ha! Jim," laughed Cad. "'Tis not madness! What you hear wells up from the throat of Ted Atwater. He's a budding genius. I heard the same, I tell you, down in the valley. I know now the boy was the cock sparrow who was furnishing the trills. Ought to have heard the vaudeville stunt he pulled off at the school-house this morning. Wow, but he did scorch Miss Arabella!"—then he caught himself. He felt his recital might not lend true colors to the face. Snowdon might see it only as a piece of impudence. He deemed it wiser to let Ted worm his way into James' affections, unassisted.

"Wonder what's all this adoption stuff the young barbarian's got in his head? Where does he live, who are his parents, do you happen to know?" James stopped short for the bird-song had turned into the twitterings of the bob-o-link, so natural that they half expected to see the saucy songster merrily swinging on a weed by a pathway through the meadows.

"Bob-o-link, bob-o-link,  
Spink, spank, spink.  
Don't double trouble  
Chee! chee! chee!"

"Well, I'll be—'tis a world full of surprises, and surprises surprise most in unfrequented places," James was

saying when the warbler rounded a clump of scrub-oak. A snowy coat of leaves still clinging to the forsaken boughs hid them till Ted was fairly upon them.

"I'll be dashed to thunder!" exclaimed the boy, stopping dead in his tracks with disappointment. He had hoped to keep his trick a secret and keep the pair guessing. He expected to find them where he had left them.

"You've a fortune in that bird-whistle of yours," said James, reaching for the camphor bottle to bathe Cad's head.

They had reached Hermit Cabin, much exhausted, just as the stars were coming out. Across the bed lay Cad somewhat stupefied but free from pain, for Jim had bathed his head and applied such ameliorating balms as the store afforded, proving himself a fine emergency nurse in a dearth of proper supplies. In his chair before the fire, he was now wearily waiting for the coffee to boil and the ham to fry, the savory odors making Ted hungrier every minute that he waited. The boy was lying on the floor by the chimney caressing the dog when he suddenly ceased and anxiously looked up at his host.

"You bucks goin' to 'dopt me into' this happy fam'ly?"

Snowdon looked aloft with a wooden face. To augment the force at the spring with juveniles was quite foreign to his notion. He viewed the idea as only a passing fancy of the boy.

"Who says I can adopt you?"

"Dad wants to clear the way so's he can marry the Widow Snugg. She's a rich old hen on the market and he wants to git into a feathered nest, see? He don't care where I go jest so's I go, see?" Here the boy rose and seated himself on a chair beside Jim. "Ain't you got somethin' I can do so's I can stay with you?"

"Tell me something of your family circle," said Jim leaning forward, the while turning the meat. "That is, how many of you are there and something about yourself before I take you in."

"Oh, I wouldn't add over one to your number," explained Ted eagerly. "Besides, I can sleep any old place,

in a corner on a shakedown if you folks are 'fraid of my fam'ly circle."

"Don't dwell on circle," Jim began, but Ted cut him off, brightening as if he had caught the right idea at last.

"Oh sure—fam'ly circle. Now, I know what you mean. Yes, we did have one at our house yisterd'y. Dad missed his chewin'. Mell—he's my brother, older'n me—was by the stove warmin' his feet when the gov'ner made the discov'ry 'twas gone 'n' without warnin' he locks the door tellin' Mell they would have to drill for a spell. Mell he's sharp and he springs up out o' reach. The gov'nor reaches for a strap on the wall an' the race was on. Ought to seen Mell," he laughed. "Mell's white hair was stickin' straight back as they cut fam'ly circles round that room. When their faces begun to git red, Mell cut the circle in two by dartin' across the room an' upsettin' a chair in Dad's way an' down went McGinty like the roof had come in. Then Mell grabbed his cap 'n' mittens, unlocked the door 'n' sung out 'Good-bye, Ted, forever; I'm goin', 'n' I watched him out o' the winder cross the clearin' till he went into the woods. That was last night. Dad wanted Mell to go. But Mell will write back to me sometime. He'll go out West where I've got two big brothers what's cow-punchers. We, dad and Mell that is, was all alone, you see, livin' down in Petrolia. Ma, she—she died washin'"—here the little fellow was struggling to keep back tears as though it were a weakness—"then Dad got the farm fever 'n' brought us out to live on Nubbin Ridge. But now he's courtin' the Widow Snugg and she's got boys o' her own an' Dad told us if it wasn't for us two youngsters he could marry money. So, you see, God hadn't ought to a sent us down to earth, I s'pose."

"Don't you worry about that, my little man," said Snowdon springing up. "We're going to eat now and you're going to have a place to sleep and don't you worry any more. Mr. Cad and I are going to look after you now."

Supper over, James made Cad as comfortable as possible in bed for the night. Ted, with Cad's approval, was put to bed with him while James, wrapped in a blanket,

chose to sleep in the deep chair before the fire-place. Lark on a bit of old sacking in a warm corner was equally well ensconced for the night, which had grown bitter cold. Boreas, lashing to fury the trees and cabin, growled down the great-throated chimney with baffled rage as the heavy damper forbade his entrance. The Barrens of all the country round was his active field of sport wherein to cavort and hurl his swirling clouds of snow.

Night was still driving on with tempestuous howl when Jim was wakened near midnight by voices. He had switched off the lights and the room was quite dark. By slow degrees, he shook off drowsiness for the tax on nerves and strength that day had exhausted every fiber of his frame.

"I am falling—falling—!" Cad was crying out. "Where are you, Jim? Falling—"

"No you ain't, Mr. Cad," Ted frantically assured him. "You are right here in bed with me 'n' Mr. Jim 'n' Lark are over there by the fire. Don't you feel my hand? You can't fall now, Mr. Cad."

"Big Ben is rolling down and we'll be buried, Jim. Don't you remember, Jim, I warned you not to build the cabin below the old monster?"

Jim was soon sponging him over with warm water, after administering drops to allay the fever. The mutterings of delirium continued.

"There goes that horn! No snow lies too deep for the Hillside-Mooney to be abroad. He's the fiery-haired old fox that can dare the winter. Up, up, Milt Cobb, and illumine your window with Jack-o'-lantern to scare Jim Snowdon till he pays you for spiriting the demon away from the Barrens! (Though Snowdon was grievously concerned over the young man's uncertain condition, deploring their remoteness from outside aid and fighting like a Trojan to baffle the fever, he caught at this piece of intelligence which seemed to flash a likely truth.) But remember, Uncle Milt, Jim Snowdon never scares. I saw him clean up a gambling joint in Tulsa when the policemen failed and backed out. Jim riddled that pumpkin in your window. Hear the shot, Milt? The Baron

of the Barrens! A true American with his heart buried in a heather-grown kirkyard among the hills o' Scotland. But——”

Is he gonna d-d-die, Mr. Jim, an' leave us, gol darn it all?” burst out Ted.

“Sh!! Keep quiet! We hope not,” cautioned Snowdon, his back to the lad, as he turned Cad's head to bathe the other side.

——“But there is another, pretty Jean MacCrea, and Jim wavers.” His voice was noticeably softer and more natural now. “O, Jean, that is you, standing by the spring,” he went on as if in a beautiful dream. “The day is June. You watch me with your soft blue eyes. But where is Jim? I fail to see him near you, yet I fear to come. O, Jim, where are you in this?”

Snowdon dropped the sponge into the basin of water. Like a flash the truth dawned on him. Cad Allen was feigning. It was one of his old tricks to discover Snowdon's part in a love affair that now involved himself. The ravings were to call an answer from Jim who would think the truth would not be understood but would soothe the sufferer. Jim Snowdon stepped back purple with rage. His overwrought nerves were taut. His first impulse was to dash the whole wash-basin of water over Cad. His next and better one was to dash outside into the night and cool off. As he ran out the boy called in earnest after him, “Why don't you wear a sheep-bell, Mr. Jim, to let Mr. Cad always know where you are? You are lost to him on the Barrens 'n' if you was belled he'd know.”

Snowdon slammed the door after him. Unrepentant, the late sufferer began to sing with a bravado he was far from feeling, however:

“‘He's drunk again in Indiana,  
And the streets he'll no more roam——’”

“If that's a dyin' song, Mr. Cad, you better sing ‘Holy Angels’,” pleaded Ted in tremulous voice, seating himself on the bed beside him. “Jim can't stand—the—the—scene.”

“Don't know it, Ted. Can't you help a feller out?”

And Ted lilted his version of a requiem, the only one he recalled:



“ ‘Hush, my babe, lie still and slumber,  
Holy angels guard thy bed;  
'Skeets and beetles without number,  
Gently buzzin' round thy head.' ”

Snowdon was not immune to levity and in the laugh that followed outside Cad drew a breath of relief. The situation was saved and he had found out all he wished to know.

## XVI

### IN FRONT OF THE GOLDSTEIN EMPORIUM

It was a strikingly odd family which left Hermit Spring to brave the deep snow down out of the hills to the lower country on a bleak December morning. Christmas was only three days away and the feeling of it was in the air. Snowdon held the lead, provided with snowshoes that Cadmus had made, the hoops of light dry hickory splints, the woven work of willow branches. The others followed on similar contrivances. Jim was jubilant, for trudging in the wake of the party was the boy of his keeping, looking and trusting to him for great things and hungry for affection. Verily, he who would satisfy such longing feels the true spirit of Christmas. He turned occasionally as he strode on down the unbeaten road, winding the hill, to catch a glimpse of the appreciative face, ever beaming at him when he looked back, and he always laughed until Ted asked why.

“A cock robin in a giant’s coat and breeches, you little dunce,” responded Cad, giving him a tug. Cad had easily tired of the responsibility of his protégé. “Give your breeches another hitch or the bottoms will look like mops when you promenade the streets of Comfort.” For Ted was in Jim’s coat and corduroy trousers, topped off with Cad’s fur cap and bottomed with his arctics and leggins. “Come, lead away, Jim. I’ve only two hours to make the train to Petrolia if you want me to bear that present to Jean. Quickstep now, you young bear of the snow-clad hills”—to Ted. And they were under motion again, laughing and jesting, the dog yelping and barking, now ahead, now behind, supposedly after game and wild with the unusual outing.

Once down in the lowlands when they came to the highway they found it well beaten, the world jingling with

sleighbells, a world to them transformed after their isolation. They hid their snow-shoes in a hay-stack near the road for they could have no further use for them till they came tramping back. As they walked down Sunrise Valley, they passed thrifty farmsteads, smoke curling from kitchen fires, the air spicy with the scent of pies, plum-puddings and other holiday pastry warm from the ovens for the Christmas feast. It was good to be among men once more. But people peeped out of windows, from behind wood-piles and around corners at them as if they were a remnant of the Confederacy on the march—big Jim swinging along, a gun over his shoulder, with the bearing of a general, the supple Allen at his side important as an aide-de-camp, and bringing up the rear an enigma that set them laughing—a small man in large clothes and by his side a very well-behaved dog that never left the road to investigate back doors. When they came to the village which was in gala array for the approaching festivities, their line of march became more interesting. Stray curs came out and set upon Lark for no other reason than true dog discord, giving Ted more or less concern, though the brawny Scot, regardless of public opinion, used his heavy shoe to good purpose whenever the scuffle became one-sided. This protection and the fearless attitude of the stalwart hillsman the rougher element of the place regarded as affrontery and they gathered in knots to hold council along the way. Yes, they had all heard of Jim Snowdon but he hadn't struck oil yet to elevate him above the common crowd. "If he kicks my dog there will be a rumpus," ran the verdict. "Carrying a gun around Christmas time" was another charge, for they did not take into account the wilds from whence he came. Boys, taking pattern after their elders, followed, hooting and jeering at Ted on the tail end of the procession.

"Are you a relative of Abraham Lincoln?" called one.

"Yes, by G—d 'n' I can lick—" but he did not finish. A snowball well aimed at his mouth cut short his boast and set the crowd into ecstatic yells. The act might have been a retribution for the oath, but when balls began

to be thrown promiscuously and from larger hands than boys', Snowdon handed his gun to Ted and stepped quickly into the middle of the street where he rolled icy balls and drove a few of them into the menacing crowd. Cad, too, made quick shift at retaliation and the whole bunch of trouble makers soon took to their heels. The incident happened in front of Goldstein's Dry Goods Store, the town's emporium, and brought out the Christmas shoppers to ascertain the cause of disturbance. Notable among them was Milt Cobb, and he beamed on James, proud of the strength of the hills, for he regarded him as now belonging to the Nubbin Ridge clique. When Ted caught sight of Milton, rocking back and forth, his hands in the pockets of the stuffy and antique overcoat that fell to his feet, the queer old cap tumbled and torn, the long hair and whiskers white like wool he ceased his crying, uncertain but that this was Santa Claus fraternizing with the crowd.

"Why didn't ye lodge a charge o' shot in 'em, Jim?" crowed old Milt. "They's a houn' pack in this town got a habit o' settin' on us Nubbin Ridge folks when they ketch one of us down here alone. They've got their combs 'n' gills cut in this toorneyment, this mornin'. Didn't know Jim Snowdon! haw! haw! haw!"—turning to others of the gazers.

"Dat owl gang off dees town ees bound to kill my Christmas trade. See dees fine coat unt cap, zhenteelmen, made from all wool!" cried Caleb Goldstein, the proprietor, who had followed his customers out, fearful that he would lose sales by the confusion.

At this moment there was a sudden cloud of snow in the street. Caleb, his glasses on the end of his beak-like nose, cried vehemently to his son inside, "Isaac, Isaac, take in de dummy for here comes Beman's tog (dog)!"

Ach! *Gott im himmel!*" screamed old Mrs. Schoenne-pickle clawing at Milt Cobb's whiskers for support, for Beman's dog, a huge, ugly-looking, crop-eared bull, had charged through the crowd after Lark, scattering and upsetting every thing in his way.

"She's in my whiskers!" yelled old Milt.

"He'll kill Lark!" screamed Ted.

"*Mein Gott! mein Gott! mein* trade ish roined! Isaac, Isaac, save de dummy!! Zhentlemen, zhentlemen, go inside unt see de all-wool goods!" shrieked Caleb.

Mrs. Schoennepickle had fallen undignified among the tangled mess of dogs and men. Jim Snowdon's hands were in a vise-like grip on the bull-dog's throat, the teeth of which were fastened in a deadly hold on the throat of the collie as he lay piteously quivering. The cords of Snowdon's neck stood out as his clutch tightened sufficiently, it would seem, to stifle the life out of a lion. It quickly told on the bull's neck. Bones were heard to crack; then Snowdon's hold relaxed and the dog dropped lax, his eyes rolled back and he lay quivering in death.

"Manhattan shirts unt Palm Beach suits! Iffry potty come in unt buy!" cried Caleb above the din of excitement, frenzied that trade was lagging.

"Cool in de very coolest vetter!" mocked Cad aboye the clamor, imitating Caleb to perfection. "Suits mittout von t'read of wool, fits shoost like paper on de vall—I wish your grantma vas here for seein'!"

Jim rose from the body of the dog and began to wipe away Ted's tears. The collie gave signs of reviving.

"And, mindt you, a scarf-pin goes mit effry suit to-day!" yelled Caleb.

"Limp, Caleb, it'll help you sell socks!" recommended Cad above the tumult for tumult it had become. Beman, the butcher of florid, baggy face with puffs beneath the eyes, owner of the dog, had arrived and was pouring forth a torrent mixture of bad English and German at Snowdon who, cool and collected as if nothing had happened, kept on assuring Ted that Lark would soon be all right.

"Feefty dollar iss de sum you pays a'ready yet for Beltznickle *oder* you make me snuff *oder* I make you snuff," roared the bellicose butcher. "He vas Berta's pet unt she vas *mein kleine mädchen*. Coonsteep! Coonsteep!" he turned and loudly called down the street, "Coom to *hier* unt ketch dis *mann* vat kilt my dog." And venerable Jerod Snodgrass, the constable, wispy and withered, bent nearly double on his cane, came deliberately forward

for news of the disturbance had reached his ears through a trumpet. Now he stopped to light his pipe, one eye on the match, the other scrutinizingly on the gathering in front of Goldstein's.

Cad turned to Snowdon and laughed as he beheld the limb of the law: "He recently walked a mile and a half in two weeks. You can make it back to the Barrens before he gets his pipe lit, Jim."

"Don't ye fear, Jim," interposed old Milt. "I'll go yer bail if ye're arrested. Ye'll beat at the trial, defendin' yer dog 'n' ye've made Comfort a safe place to live in. I never passed Beman's place that that brute didn't come out 'n' smile at me, red-eyed 'n' ready. Old Milt Cobb is with ye, Jim."

"And more are with you," said a cultivated voice and one of Comfort's best citizens stepped forward, a well-dressed man of at least fifty years. "That brute has been a menace to this town. Go and bury your dog," turning to the vociferous Beman, "with all the honors due Beltznickle and you will have more friends and more custom."

"O, Mr. Snowdon, I so much hope that you won't be apprehended and incarcerated in durance vile for the ignoble death of a burly mastiff." It was the alarmed voice of Jerushy Henshaw in her grandmother's furs, an heirloom, as she arrived with Riley and ascertained the cause of the trouble.

"Thank you, Miss Henshaw," said Jim smiling, the crowd laughing, as he turned to Allen. "Go, Cad. You'll barely make your train. I won't wait for you but take the kid and go back home when this blows over."

"Take the kid, hey?" mockingly came from out the crowd and a surly looking man with ill-dressed beard stepped to the front. "What are you doing with my boy, Snowdon?"

Ted grasped Snowdon's hand and coat and in terror begged not to be delivered over to his father for he it was. The cringing of the boy greatly incensed the man, for to be dreaded in public by his own posterity was very humiliating. Reaching for Ted again, he demanded: "What are you doing here with my boy, I say?"

“Hands off till I can answer,” warned Jim, coolly pushing Ted behind him. “I am doing, or going to do just what you should be doing: buying him some comfortable clothes. Why don’t you do it?” he inquired in a freezing voice. “He is a bright little fellow and merits some kind of a bringing up. True, I’ve no lawful right to him but he came to me half-starved, half-clad with several scars on his back from your gad. If that precious package there under your arm that you’re guarding so tenderly, were opened, it would no doubt tell where your money goes instead of to your children. You don’t want Ted but you might wring something out of me for sheltering him. I see. When a father dies and leaves a family, the mother usually scrambles to keep them together. On the other hand, if the mother is taken, then the father loses no time in scattering the youngsters to marry again. Now——”

“Here, zhents, here I shows you de very best-made suspenders from de celebrated mills of Flanders—seve’ty-five cents to-day vat solt for one dolla’ yistaday.” It was Caleb again. He had returned and was standing in the doorway holding up and stretching the commodity and pleading for customers. “Bemen, if you can’t haul Beltznickle away wid dem where you vish to bury him mittout breaking dem, I geef you de pair free gratis, so help me Gott!” And Caleb threw the suspenders at Beman’s feet.

When Jim looked around Atwater had disappeared and left the boy. The crowd began to disperse. Beman slunk away while two boys with the suspenders hitched to Beltznickle’s collar went dragging him down the street, followed by Caleb, who zealously admonished them not to jerk or the bet would be off.

## XVII

### THREE DREAMS

Festive Petrolia in holiday attire!! Crowded streets, noisy with Christmas shoppers; equipages gay with silvery bells, the riders warm in heavy furs; windows decked with wreaths of holly tied with bows of red ribbon, and fluted bells of red and white! In the shops stood Christmas trees glinting with toys, lollipops and candies, festooned with popcorn and tinsel stars for the children. Not infrequently a Santa stood near; one, especially, with rubicund face, white whiskers, cap and coat was such a genuine replica of Milt Cobb that Cad Allen (looking for a haberdasher of some sort) stopped to laugh and proclaimed aloud: "But we've the genuine article out on Nubbin Ridge."

"Of whom did you speak?" inquired a tremulous voice, suggestive of advanced age, at his elbow.

"Milt Cobb," he replied, turning abruptly to face a very elderly lady of pleasing though anxious countenance. Her rich attire bespoke opulent circumstances.

"Milton Cobb is my youngest brother," she began, "and Oh, how I—"

Mr. Cadmus Allen had vanished in a trice around the corner, uncertain whether she wished to reprimand him for his pictorial adaptation of Mr. Cobb or to send greetings of the season. On the spur of the moment, he deemed a good run wiser than a poor stand. An hour later, the episode was entirely obliterated as he stood before a cheval glass regarding himself long and earnestly. And well he might for he was dressed a la mode for the first time in four months.

Lavender shirt, collar so high it chafed him, blue tie, "patent leathers," Fedora—"I look like the Prince of Wales, Jim will say when he gets a squint," was his ver-



dict. In the new overcoat with black fur collar he stepped into the street, the "glass of fashion and the mould of form." Yet his clothes irked him. He wished he were out of them and back in the old sweater which was in the package under his arm. Was anyone looking who had seen him go in? He felt the whole town was gazing.

But he quickly remembered the precious parcel—too precious for the mails—he was to deliver to Jean MacCrea for Jim. Jean MacCrea! He would cross a continent to get another sight of her! He felt her the type for which men swim rivers, climb mountains, and throw themselves down from high places. And himself a "John Alden?" Not he. When the doorbell was answered he would just bow and say for whom the package was intended. But if only he could get just one glimpse of her! Perhaps she might answer the bell! Then he could go back to dream of her again in the lonely woods. He groaned and was gazing ruefully into a great plate glass window which held a display of diaphanous mysteries, enticing as the wardrobe of Cleopatra, when he caught his breath and wavered. He caught a reflection of Jean MacCrea slowly passing the window.

Jean, accompanied by Mrs. MacIntyre, was plainly feasting her eyes on the bright colors and filmy laces. Good Mrs. MacIntyre by the angle at which she held her head vividly manifested the fact that she regarded them as wanton. She felt abashed to be seen there, her sombre dress strongly in contrast with the gayety of fashion.

"A'm oot o' me sphere, Jean, coom awa'. Dinna let me be seen gakin' at the nude fashions o' a warl that's turned a back tae modeesty. Nae mair is decency respectit an' we're gaen back tae the times when the coverin' wees juist a few fig leaves. Coom awa', chiel," Allen heard as he approached.

"Beg pardon," he said as he lightly touched Jean's arm to draw her attention."

She turned and lifted a pair of the bluest eyes to meet his and his heart beat audibly. "I came from—". He hesitated from lack of words for an errand so delicate,

while Auntie MacIntyre gave him one riveting look, turned her back and slowly walked on.

—"from Scotland," laughed Jean coming to the rescue, for she rather liked the face of her captor and enjoyed his embarrassment.

—"from the Barrens," he blurted, inwardly thanking her for helping him out of his difficulty and putting him more at ease. "No, I should have said that I came to deliver a message and a parcel from Mr. Snowdon," he corrected himself and grew serious. "My name is Allen."

Then Jean looked serious, likewise. "And why will he not come himself at Christmas time, I wonder. We invited and expected him. And—you—with him," she faltered. "But let us move on or we will be moved by the ordinance," she laughed again. "I guessed who you were," she said as they started.

He smiled and thanked her for an invitation of which he knew nothing previous to the time. Then he attempted an apology for Snowdon, telling of his own accident and Ted's addition to the family, thus acquitting Jim of any charge of indifference.

"Dear old Jim! Always carrying the burdens of others," said Jean.

They strolled in the direction of the station for Cad's time was limited, his train leaving at the noon hour. Mrs. MacIntyre was a few steps ahead. She always carried her head at a dignified elevation, but now it was slightly more elevated than usual, and when she turned it with a quick jerk to see if they followed, Jean knew what the arched brows meant. The old lady was a severe advocate of straight-laced decorum, and the tête-a-tête on the street with a stranger was sure to be followed by a parental lecture that evening. And it was. Mrs. MacIntyre gravely informed her that the young bushwhacker in question reminded her of a big drum, full of emptiness and sound. Snowdon, she contended, could have mailed his gimcrack and that would have saved her a mortifying march ahead of that "gillie." Dear knows, if Allen had appeared at the house with it, he might have boarded a week before he left it and went. She would shield Jean from snares in

a land where, heavens knew, boldness stalked abroad. "And," she ended, when Jean could no longer endure the scolding and started for her room, "ye can nae mair hold fast the friendship o' quick acquaintance wi' a young man than ye can hold quicksilver in yeer hand."

But Mother MacIntyre, the personification of propriety, was not the only one that evening to hold an adverse opinion of Jean's intercourse with Allen.

In the cabin at Hermit Spring, by the warmth of a glowing fire on the hearth, over the steaming cup of fragrant coffee that Jim had prepared and kept waiting for him, Allen with sparkling eyes was relating the events of the trip, with slight reservations, to Jim and Ted.

But Ted could not be still for long. He could parallel everything that Cad had to relate and continually interjected bits of his own travels that day. "Gee! If you could have seen Mr. Jim scatter the owl gang as we was comin' out of Comfort. He said he could lick all the damned rubbish in—"

"Be still, boy. I didn't say that," Jim cut in. "Listen while Cad tells me what Jean said as they parted." There was the crux. Jim was narrowly watching and listening to Allen at every point of the narrative, yet he, himself, had sent him with the present. "And she promised she would not open the package till Christmas morning?" he asked.

"Yes, you did say damn, Mr. Jim. You was hot," Ted persisted. "You said it when you knocked that big duffer off of the steps when we come away from the store and he tripped you."

"Rub Lark's throat again with the liniment and give him a bone, Ted. "Did she promise?"

"Yes. And she told me to tell you that she had left the employ of Snowdon and Son; that she had another position and would enter upon her duties at the close of the holidays; that she had invited us all down for Christmas but"—here he paused, his questioning eyes meeting Jim's which were keenly watching him lest there be touches of imagination intermingled with truth. down from high places. And he a "John Alden?" Not

"I expected her to tell you all that," was the laconic reply. Then Jim waited for more to follow.

Cad swerved and with a laugh told that she had received an invitation from the Cobbs to spend Christmas on Nubbin Ridge but Mrs. MacIntyre's grim school of etiquette knew no such festival and that aside from the cherished present Jim had sent, Christmas would be without celebration for Jean.

"You say Auntie had her eagle eye out for you, Cad. What is your impression of Jean's guardian?" Jim asked it with an interest visibly deep.

"Remember that old coon down by the creek, Mr. Jim, when we's comin' home that offered you forty cents a cord to cut wood for him if you'd take part pay in dried apples and butternuts? Gee! but I'd like the butternuts!" And Ted left the dog which lay on an old coat by the fire in a fair state of convalescence, and put his arms around Jim's neck the better to wheedle him.

"What is my impression of old sniffy, her nose always in the air?" Allen deliberated. "She's a steel-armored old cruiser, flying pirate colors fore and aft, decks cleared ready to go into action at a moment's notice. And take it from me, keep out of range of her guns!"

Snowdon looked a satisfaction he deemed unwise to utter.

"Bet she hain't any more snappy than old Mis' Cobb. She tells old Milt she had a cow 'n' five dollars when she married him a dozen times a day. Over to Jerushy Henshaw's quiltin' she told 'em all of her settin' out when she's married; 'n' us kids got it to school—'coaw 'n' five dollars when I married ye, ye lazy ole bum.' Gee! I wish't you'd take that butternut job, Mr. Jim," and Jim got an extra hug.

"When I get rested, I'll get up and pop you some corn," Jim offered by way of compromise, taking him on his knee.

"Give the little pest a bottle and put him to bed," roundly advised Allen. "How's the dog?"

"Mr. Jim says it was just the trainin' for him. Next time he goes to town, he'll be science," declared the boy

with animation, piling over onto Cad's knee. "But he did say he could lick all the damned rubbish in Comfort," he stoutly averred, "an' I'm tellin' the truth."

Not a little perturbed that all his moral advice to Ted had seemed to "gang alee," Jim forced a laugh. "Young man, I'll pop no corn for you if you don't quit your tales."

"Must have been quite a strain gettin' out of Comfort accordin' to the kid. Raised Ned again, did they, before you left?" Cad inquired.

"Oh man, it beat the Battle of Hohenlinden, the way Mr. Jim did clean 'em up!" cried Ted, bubbling over with pride at the valor of his benefactor. "Y'ou see, a bunch gathered at the edge of town to maul us when we come out. Some had barrel staves, some had wagon-wheel spokes and everything they could get hold of. They was just at the end of the big bridge as you're leavin' town. Wal, they stopped us and one said: 'So you're the Baron of the Barrens be ye? Come to town to lord it over all creation! We'll teach ye that all men are born ekel. And when in the course of human events'—can't think of the rest he said but Mr. Jim 'lowed it hadn't ought to take a whole regiment to make him b'lieve in the Constitution and respect their flag; then he ast 'im if the whole town of Comfort was there. The big cuss 'lowed there was 'nough of them collected together to make him become a humble citizen or bite the dust if he didn't."

"Then Mr. Jim 'lowed they did look kind of thick to go through 'n' wish't he had a cowketcher on to scoop up the mess when he started to clear the right of way; 'n' before the words was out of his mouth, he jumped 'n' took that gink right under the jaw, a biff that when he went back he knocked over three or four more. Then of all the whirlin' 'n' tearin' and in the mess, they was strikin' their own men more'n they was hittin' Mr. Jim 'n' the air was jest full o' barrel-staves an' wagon-spokes an' cussin.' Last, Mr. Jim knocked one off the bridge with a club into the water, and give out a yell 'Man overboard!' Then he told me to beat it; 'n' we struck out for the happy land all alive 'n' with hardly a scratch. Oh, Mr. Jim's a regular cyclone when he hain't teachin' a feller Sunday-school dope."

Long before he was through with his story, Jim was ready with the corn while Cad began to sing:

“‘Ev’ry time I come to town,  
The boys keep kickin’ my houn’ aroun’;  
It makes no diff’rence if he is a houn’  
They gotta quit kickin’ my dawg aroun.’”

“Cad!” Ted spoke with much impressiveness, “guess what Mr. Jim got me to go to school with over the snow! Skis! Yup, and I’m goin’ to begin again after the holidays. Got a little gun, too, to keep off cats an’ anything prowlin’ in the woods. They are over to Henshaws’. Couldn’t carry all our things an’ Riley took them home with him.”

“You young fool, how are you going to walk three miles to that corn-cob seminary!” blurted Allen, flouting the idea of such a feat in winter, in such a country with no roads. “You never could reach there till noon.”

“Start ’fore daylight. An’ in storms I’m to stay with the Henshaws. It’s arranged. Then when the oil well comes in’ I’m to help keep guard ’n’ make her a mystery. That’s another use for my gun. Oh, say, I got that rabbit in the trap that we chased under the brush-pile. Mr. Jim dressed it ’n’ hung it outside to freeze for Christmas. Such a feast as will be at the Barrens! Gee! It’ll be the greatest Christmas for me since—” and Allen’s ready sympathy responded to the tears in the boy’s eyes.

“Wring out your dish-rags and fall to,” said Jim, pouring melted butter over the corn. “We will all be bawling here in a minute if everything we see and eat is to remind us.”

Cad turned on him: “Think of the sore heads down in unhappy Comfort tonight! Think of the pain and misery of those dogs of war unleashed for battle with no fear of defeat, who thought to go about the streets boasting that they had laid low the mighty Baron of the Barrens who would no longer lord it o’er his groveling serfs. Where are they now that sought to make him kiss their

emblem? Woe, they are an offense to the eye! Their hearthstones are cold and they lie in rows in the hospital. Only the skill of cheerful Dr. Merriweather can prolong their lives to see a Christmas. 'O, ye mothers of Dunedin, ye may look in vain for them—'

"Quite enough, Mr. Allen. I didn't know you had breath in you for such a speech. Help yourself to the corn and after that, the last layout for the evening, weary as lost Bedouins, let us consecrate the night to sleep. I, for one, don't wish to wake up for a week."

"As thick as three in a bed" is an old and common saying metaphorically used to deride intimacy. And yet when it becomes literal, and put to the test then nothing perhaps is so thick. Yet with little Ted for the filler of the sandwich, in very cold weather, the trio felt none too crowded and slumbered very comfortably in that fashion. Upon that memorable night, however, the overfed and overtired boy fell into an uneasy sleep and began to thrash about and throw off covers and break into wildest snatches of bird notes. No sooner did the unappreciative Cadmus, with a threat to throw him out of bed, shake him into silence than he would break out into minstrelsy again. Jim, half asleep, lay yawning and laughing at each fresh outburst and Allen's discomfiture.

"Oh, good, nice little Teddy Bear, do cut out your bed orgy and, by what's left of me in the morning, I'll journey unto Comfort and buy you a drum to beat with your soft little paws, about the only thing lacking to drive us mad."

This broke the restless sleeper's chain of melody for the time.

"Give 'em hell, Jim! Clear the bridge! Drive 'em into the river! You're the old boy, Jim, that can knock out the whole bunch! There goes one of 'em overboard into the water!" yelled the dreamer sitting up.

Allen gave him a punch and leaped out of bed. Snowdon's laughter was irrepressible. Writhing he pressed his side with one hand and clutched a bedpost with the other.

Cad switched on the lights, poked up the fire, then wrapped himself in a blanket and dropped down, disgusted, into one of the reclining chairs by the fireplace,

declaring it his belief that the young imp would die of tremens before morning. Ted, his eyes wide open and glassy, took in the scene with a bewildered stare, declaiming, sotto voce.

“‘I love it, I love it, and who shall dare  
To chide me for loving that old arm chair.’”

Cad gave way to a despairing groan but Jim pulled the dreamer down into bed.

“Go to sleep now, Ted. You have driven Cad out and if you don’t stop this ribaldry, I’ll have to fill your mouth with pepper.”

Then Ted began to dream afresh.

So vividly and connectedly did Ted’s dream unfold that he lived and perceived as in wakeful hours. It really was dual life, for all that happened was as tangible to him as when in the state of consciousness.

At the beginning, he found himself standing in a jungle, dense and dark, where tall evergreens intermingled their branches so thickly as to exclude the faintest ray of sunlight. In the murky fastness, the only sound that broke the solitude was the sighing of the pines in the soft breeze that moved their tops. Afraid to move, uncertain of the place and how he came to be there, he tried to cry out but a fear of wild beasts that might be prowling near, took him by the throat and in dumb terror he sank to the ground in a hopeless, helpless heap, his face upon his breast, and began to sob bitterly. Only for a moment he wept thus. He felt a presence near. Fearfully he lifted his head and lo! a short way off, he beheld his mother. No mistaking, for a golden light was shimmering down through the green foliage round about her. She was robed in white flowing garments, a radiant halo shining round her head and the mournful brown eyes he remembered so well were tenderly gazing down upon him. All fear of being lost in an interminable forest suddenly fled; and with frantic joy he leaped up, reaching forth his hands and striving to touch her, at the same time crying out: “Oh, my mother!” But the strange part was that his advance



brought him no nearer to her and she gave no answer in response to his pleading call.

Then he began to grow afraid again and paused; his hopes had crumbled into nothingness and to add to other terrors he now felt this to be only a shadow. But instantly her face lighted up with a new and greater glory as she raised one white hand and beckoned him on. He seemed to have lost control of himself. His will power had utterly left him, and by a strange divination he sought to follow. At first, the way was rough and flinty to his bare feet; but he struggled on. And straight the airy spirit parted the great tree trunks from the way. Out of the depths into a better land they traveled, for after a time the forest grew thin and a mellow sunlight dispelled the gloom. But the heavenly vision of his mother dimmed as light increased, and when at last he emerged into the open on the banks of a wide stream, rippling over amber-flecked sands, she had entirely vanished and left him with a sad, sad heart. But joy Oh, joy! From the other shore, he caught the strains of dreamy music and as he yearnfully gazed across the waters, he was enraptured with a fair landscape. Close down to the water's edge, he could see lush grasses and gay flowers and where the bank rose to the higher level above, groves of trees, like the palms he had seen in pictures, were dotted over a wide grassy plain. The inhabitants of such an enchanted country, he felt, must be kindly people and he longed to be there.

But how to reach the other side was no easy matter to decide. If he attempted to wade, the stream, which looked to be shallow from where he was standing, in mid-channel might be deep and engulf him. There must be a ferryman in such a land. He was about to whistle when behold! from out the forest on the opposite side came a young man who walked briskly toward the shore, looking across as if expectant of his arrival. At the water's edge from out the reeds and rushes the stranger pulled a boat very like a gondola; then he turned to Ted, gave a wave of the hand and put to sea. On, on, over the glittering ripples came the craft, gracefully as the white swan rides the still lake. In the stern stood the boatman dipping oar, and it

seemed to take no effort to propel the boat. At last it grounded on the shoals near the bank. Then the gondolier dropped the oar and stretched his arms invitingly for Ted to wade the remaining distance. How cooling was the water to his bare and aching feet! And when he neared the boat, it was to behold a merry laughing fellow of comely face, wearing a high cap, bespangled with bells and set back rakishly on his head. About the shoulders hung loosely a red cloak of some rich texture; for the rest of his attire, he wore a tight-fitting suit of the stripes and hues of the rainbow, the only relief a ruff about the loins. Strangest of all, his feet were encased in thick cloth shoes of blue, folding down at the top, the toes long and pointed. To Ted, he presented a striking resemblance to a picture of a king's fool that he had once seen in a story book. Yet the face was very familiar—where had he seen it before? He could not recall the name but undaunted he hopped into the prow and took a seat on a fluffy cushion, for surely a denizen of that blissful shore beyond could not do him harm.

Uneventful was the voyage across and the landing. And when Ted, following behind his deliverer, approached a grove not far from the stream, he was thrilled with the scene. The sky over this fair land was of a clearer, deeper blue than he had ever before beheld, with occasional stray cloudlets, red as the flamingo's wing, floating in the distance, streamers heralding a fair day. Here the air, a glinting flood of sunshine, seemed lighter, and easier to breathe than in the land from whence he came. Just at the border of the forest the jester turned to him, his eyes lighted with mischief, and pointed to the branches. Not palms were they as Ted had anticipated, but great butternut trees with their glossy, green compound leaves and clusters of oily, velvet-coated nuts, turning a rich autumnal brown! And, too, the trees were full of squirrels and fairies throwing the nuts down in showers! He forgot his strange appearance there and began to scramble around and gather nuts; but misery, his pockets held but few! The jester whirled on one heel

till his cloak lifted in a circle, and laughed at his discomfiture when lo! down an avenue from among the trees, came strolling—yes, it was he and dressed like a baron, the Baron of the Barrens!—with basket and sacks, smiling an invitation to gather the nuts! And then he knew Cadmus, the jester, who began to help him rake up the store. Oh, joy he had found his friends in a land of butternuts!

Jim awoke at a glad cry from the boy to find his arms about his neck in a squeeze that threatened his breath. "Lay over, Ted, and nip this bear-hug this minute," he said, pulling Ted's arms free and gently pushing him away.

Cad roused at the disturbance and mumbled in his dream, "But Jim stands between. Yes, dear old Jim! What am I to do! If only I could tell."

To Ted, in all the years thereafter, his dream that night was ever vivid in memory and he regarded it as significant: he always believed it had been his mother's guardian spirit commending him to Snowdon, a psychic phenomenon revealed in a vision.

James, too, had a wonderful dream that night. Over the Barrens he saw oil wells everywhere among the rocks and every well a gusher, the fluid rising high above the city of derricks. No pipes, no tankage could ever hold it and down the hillsides ran rivers of oil till at last all the hollows and ravines were filled and still it rose higher and higher till in time nothing of the hills remained in sight above the rich deluge save the top of Big Ben. He had early taken refuge on the giant rock. As the oil rose slowly but steadily around the monster he felt he was destined to die by his riches and miserably awaited his fate. His eyes scanned the horizon for some other mark or point yet above the flood and lo! in the distance he beheld Uncle Milt and Aunt Ibbey on the roof of their floating cabin, likewise awaiting destruction. But far from resigned was Aunt Ibbey, for he fancied he heard her commanding Milt to take his stinkin' oil and give her back the cow and five dollars that she had when she married him. At this he awoke with a sonorous laugh which stirred the dreamer sitting over in the chair to maudlin

talk. Ted was next to arouse and lay partially awake, wondering at the fancies of the troubled lover.

“Oh, Jean of my heart,” Cadmus rambled, “you were wrapped in the furs of winter but you are spring! The blue of the larkspur is in your eyes.”

“‘Oh but me Biddy has beautiful eyes!

Like eggs in a soap-tub now sink and now rise!’”

Ted sang out sleepily, far from any intention to interrupt. But it stilled the dreamer.

“I wonder if both hearts were answering today the world-old call of love to youth and youth?” wondered Jim. He lay awake till the sun peered in at the cabin window.

## XVIII

### CHRISTMAS ON NUBBIN RIDGE

Did ever the stars spangle the dome of heaven as on that frosty, Christmas night? To the eyes of Nubbin Ridge they had never shimmered so brightly. Chores were slighted in order to get an early start and soon after the sun had dropped below the high western hills, the schoolhouse was packed to suffocation and still they came. In the judgment of the Ridge no talent could ever hope to excell that of their own beloved hump of earth, no matter who the celebrity or from whence he hailed. Sleigh-bells and merry voices rang through the clear air as the smooth runners glided over the white roads from Comfort, from Blue Ruin, from Jerusalem Corners, and even from Joppa to reach the scene of Yuletide festivities. As each succeeding sleigh unloaded at the door, proud hearts who were fortunate enough to be listed on the program beat almost audibly from intermingled fear and pride. After a time it ceased to be a crowd and became a jam. Aunt Ibby Cobb, who had arrived early to get an advantageous seat, had been forced to move along so many times that at last, squeezed beyond endurance—a peppery temper might have had something to do with it—she swooned. Friends rubbed her face with a snowball till the remedy exceeded the malady and brought her to with a sigh of relief. When clamorous confusion was at the highest, Solon Cipher, the latest importation in the pedagogical line, called for order in a tremulous basso from the rostrum.

Now Solon as he poised above the receptive audience presented the scholarly appearance of a sage. He was yet a young man despite the long, solemn face that extended up over the crown of his head and almost down to the base of the skull. His chin was sharp, an indication of sensitiveness and lack of resolution. As he lifted his

head with a peculiar jerk to begin his words of greeting, some one in the rear of the house said "weasel," and the quip caught with the crowd, judging from suppressed laughter. Solon colored and much abashed waded into his chosen remarks: "Friends and fellow travelers to the tomb: We have congregated this evening to commemorate once again the birth of the Babe; to rejoice and be exceeding glad; to give and receive. Yet do we this in the true thankful spirit of the Christian, ever mindful of the Holy Gift to a benighted world for the remission of sin? You who are not within the pale of the church——"

Derisive bawls of "Me! Me! Me!" that came from different quarters of the house sorely incommoded Solon's oratorical flight. He paused, then attempted to drown further din by fairly shouting, "I should say, I would say, only baptism from a sinful world can place us where we can enjoy to the fullest measure and in the right sense the true spirit of a Christmas tree,"—pointing to a large and beautiful evergreen standing at his right, the boughs hanging down from the weight of pop-corn balls, fried-cakes in the shape of men and dogs, blue overalls, gingham aprons, red bandannas some cheap toys and what not.

"Lead us down to Hazel Fork, Professor, an' dip us so we can enjoy yon tree like you feel it," came a voice from the rear of the room and turned what was to have been an opening address into pandemonium. Solon subsided. There was fretting of disappointed children, mingled with coarse remarks and laughter of the rougher element, standing in the back part of the room. The happy event for a time seemed threatened. But night brings out the stars. It was at such a pitch that the wasp-like Widow Wiggins, the forceful Superintendent of the Sunday-School, blustered to the forum and in a voice that sounded like scouring knives, berated them for their unbecoming behavior. Not a soul there, guilty or not guilty, but that withdrew into itself when with blazing eyes she shot the arrow that even the "Injuns" respected order at their gatherings; and then left the alternative

to them, "git quiet or git out." Accustomed to rasps from the Widow's bitter tongue, they took it goodhumoredly, for after all, their's was not rowdyism but the artless humor of the hills.

"Now," said the Widow rigidly when the order was passably fair, removing her sample-sales bonnet from Petrolia, the envy of the female persuasion, and tossing it onto a nearby table, "Preacher Wilder will next address the heathen." Then stiffly she seated herself in state as the central figure of ceremonies.

The evangelist shambled onto the platform, a weird preternatural figure, one of God's accidents. He was at once bent and tall, like a pine blasted by lightning, and gaunt as a hound back from the chase; his weathered features were brown and wrinkled as a baked apple; his eyes were those of a seer, sunken in dark pits; iron-gray hair, long and stiff, stood over his head like the pricklers of the chestnut burr. His whole form was clad in donations too scanty for the long wrists and shanks.

He was considered a trifle "queer"; but whether mortal frailty or some occult endowment, was beyond the ken of man. He came and went, no one knew whither; blew in, frequently, with a big wind or storm, or followed in its wake. No lumber camp was there in several counties but that told tales of "Father Wilder." These camps seemed to be his favorite sphere for exposition of Mosaic law, or for picturing horns, hoofs, darting tongue, spiked tail and pitchfork so vividly as to bring the most hardened "woods-heck" leaping to the mourners' bench. Thus he fared over the hills and through the wilderness in heat and cold, feasting or starving as the chances might be, scourging and purging the unregenerate, his speech venomous as the needs demanded. That he had been retained when he came drifting through, to speak on this occasion, was due to the foresight and untiring efforts of Uncle Milt Cobb.

As he stood there in silence for the large fraction of a minute, his head bent forward taking measure of the assemblage through his shaggy brows, the room grew so hushed that nothing could be heard but the ticking of a clock on the wall when a low but audible voice came from

somewhere behind the tree. "I've seen such before but only in the strongest of cages!"

"Mr. Allen, I call you to a point of order!" snapped the chairman.

Father Wilder, calloused to taunts, ignored the remark, but it seemed to be the thing required to swing him off. He thundered with velocity, "Ye time-honored corn crackers of Nubbin Ridge:"—then paused to give his salutation time to stir a deep and silent response.

"I'd hate to meet him in the woods on all fours," again came from behind the tree.

But Mrs. Wiggins did not have time to reprimand the heckler before the speaker bellowed out in a flat monotone, "In answer to the call of His children to be with them to-night and speak on the wisdom of celebratin' the time of the birth of our Saviour, I have appeared to fulfill that mission. 'Whom say ye that I am?'" Here he drew up in an amazing stretch, with hands uplifted, the great knotty fingers spreading like grotesque fans! "I don't pull in the ecclesiastical harness of any church," he continued transfixed in his gesture. "My ordination comes down from the Most High and not from man. With rapt eye do I behold signs and portents in the canopy of the sky when I gaze aloft. The tempest's roar on the mountains to me is the voice of the Almighty speakin' His decrees. Lightning playing in the storm at night hath no terrors but guides me on to the next stop where I chose to harbor and refresh." He drew back and paused as though to impress them further with his greatness.

"I have walked over the hills of Pennsylvany; I've crossed the Catskin (Catskill) Mountains; I've dipped in the waters of Tallow Creek. I preached the Mosaic law in this settlement under the trees before there was any houses with winders; I've visited this goodly place many a time sence then and on the occasions when I've found the men swillin' down hard cider, I've scourged them with whips of the Pentateuch. In speech you find me hewin' right to the line. To that son of Belial, settin' now back in there behind the tree pourin' out venom, to him I would say no more do I mind his slack than a flea bite.



He deserves chastisement by scorpions. In my mind's eye, I see upon his brow the seal of the devil. O, ye people! cast him out from your midst if you would be pure."

The deafening applause that followed made the welkin ring with joy, Allen participating loudest and longest. This reconciled the speaker in the belief that his prophecy would be enacted later and again he resumed his theological discourse.

"How thankful we should be in these very forgetful times that the birth of the Saviour was to end the old order of sacrifice. His life lessons, His sufferin' and in the end, His blood atoned for our sins, our indifference to our Father's blessin's that He bestows on us thankless critters. What an ordeal it would be if we had to go out an' gather up stones, build an altar, cut the throat of a bullock or a ram and spill its blood over the wood on the altar then set it afire, all this to prove our faith and our strong will to obey. Think of the test of Abraham!"

Thereupon Father Wilder began a dramatic recital of the story of Abraham's obedience. While he talked, he threw himself into the attitude of a raving tragedian and the effect was truly spell-binding to the row of boys seated before him at the foot of the platform. In pantomime, Wilder cleaned the wood for the fire; he saddled the ass and loaded him and started for the mountain; there he took the small innocent Isaac and laid him on the altar which he builded; then he took fire in his hand and a great knife and stretched forth his hand to slay Isaac. In answer to the cry out of heaven, he answered, "'Here am I.'" Here he pretended to spy the ram in the bushes. During the episode of catching it, a small boy before him, in great relief at Isaac's escape, his teeth chattering, stut-tered out while his eyes bulged from their sockets, "Gram-pap! Grampap! D-d-d-y-y-y-e 's'pose if that ar man hadn't seen that ar buck in them ar bushes he'd a killed that ar boy?"

The house now completely broke away from Father Wilder and he was forced to conclude his eccentric remarks. He dropped onto the seat he had vacated with a

thud and soon sank into oblivion for the remainder of the exercises, his head bent forward, dozing through the numbers.

Next on the program came a few cutting remarks by the Widow Wiggins, herself. She advocated the view that a Sabbath school should be kept open only for a few weeks before the Holidays as that was the only time when the attendance was worth taking. They crowded in then to be remembered by a sack of candy on the tree, she said, and the indifference to things spiritual, unless a piece of candy was likely to be in store, was a trial to the spirit of the righteous. This was the annual tirade of devoted Sister Wiggins and it was always well received as was the snoring of Uncle Lysander Hatch who annually slept through the session. When she had taken her last fling at them, she weakly announced, "Song by Messers. Henshaw and Allen," and sat wearily down, much as if she carried the weight of the sins of the world upon her shoulders.

The "nightingales" came from behind the tree looking almost blood-guilty and took positions beside the little organ, an octogenarian, which was the property of Jerushy Henshaw and at which she was elected to preside by virtue of ownership.

Across the rostrum walked Vanity Fair—Jerushy! Her costume was a kind to take the breath. It was so sudden! The hobble skirt, abbreviated to audacity, daringly revealed the slimmest of supports. Low neck and short sleeves further displayed the emaciated form till she was a living study in anatomy. Numerous strings of beads failed utterly to disguise the slender neck. First and quick sight of her was to excite the opinion that something had fallen from the tree. Whether Father Wilder was dreaming, or whether he was half-awake for a moment and beheld her when he said, "Lord be merciful," remains problematical. But truth it is, he relapsed thereafter into a deeper stupor. Jerushy had pitifully flowered out on Christmas Eve in the street pattern of the times, casting conservatism to the winds. As she seated herself at the instrument, the Widow Wiggins darted her head over to Minnehaha

Jones sitting near her and hissed, "She looks like one o' the South Sea Islanders with short grass dresses I seen down to Yank Robinson's circus last May," and as quickly jerked back into rigid position again. It was noised around afterwards that Jerushy had scandalized by dress the dames of Nubbin Ridge for the love of Jim Snowdon.

Nothing short of torrential was the manner in which Jerushy descended on that squeaky little cottage organ. "She made the sparks fly," was Milt Cobb's version of the catastrophe. Cadmus was to launch out before Riley, and to get in on her tune was like chancing a jump when two are whirling a skipping rope. He pitched his voice a key too high under the exciting conditions and Riley, breaking in on a key too low, made music as weird as a Chinese orchestra. Then Jerushy took up the soprano.

"Hosanna! to the Babe in the manger,  
In Bethlehem far o'er the sea,"

a shriek to raise the rafters.

Ungifted in dulcet sounds as were these people, they could not stand the strain long and when a dog outside gave a protesting howl, they burst into a manifestation that was not applause. It struck deep with Jerushy. The song ended; the player lapsed into one of those dread fits to which she was subject, but maintained a perfect position on the organ stool, stark as a corpse, the wide glassy eyes seeing nothing, a reproach to her tormentors. Then followed a scramble, a general uprising of excited voices and Riley and Cadmus in the midst of the confusion, their laurels lost, bore the unfortunate woman behind the tree. So ended another number.

But the Widow Wiggins was a born commander and it was her gallantry to bring order out of chaos and set things moving again with new push and vim that bordered on frenzy.

"Order! Git quiet! Can't you understand!" she shrilly ordered as they were sitting down in their seats again. "Jerushy has only got one o' her conniption fits agin. It's plain highstericks she has. She's not all the program

and 'tain't likely the next one turns into wax-work. Raise a winder there, Solon Cipher, to let in more air," while Solon made kangaroo leaps to carry out the mandate.

Some outlander in the crowd, not sympathetic with the gathering, now cried out, "The next on the program will be a jig by Milt Cobb." Milton was not in the house now, by pre-arrangement, and did not return the repartee but a dark figure rose in a remote corner and silhouetted a massive form on the wall, menacing to the disorderly. It had a quick calming effect. The Baron of the Barrens!

Presently the entertainment was moving glibly again in the hands of a new cast of characters, the juveniles. They elicited more charity than their elders, their crude delivery pleasing the plain folks to the utmost. But the Widow Wiggins kept a prod ready for them which was never withheld. "Don't speak so fast," she was sure to say when the recital went too hurriedly; "Speak louder"—when it was low; "Don't yell"—when it was loud; "Don't talk through your nose"—when one emitted nasal sounds; "Hold up your head"—when one bashfully inclined; "Clear the phlegm out of your throat,"—when one spoke thickly; "You ain't countin' stars,"—when one looked at the ceiling; "You'll git your candy,"—when one looked at the tree; "Your dress fits good 'nough behind"—when one turned a look that way; "Your shoes tight?"—when one kept stepping; "Don't be mulish,"—when one balked a moment; "Don't paw an' dig like a horse,"—when one kept scraping; "Now laugh, you silly,"—this time to a simper.

But the redeeming feature of the evening was Ted Atwater. Nimble and graceful, the active form of the boy, a notable contrast to those who had awkwardly sham-bled out before him, caught the house with a breathless hush as he appeared on the platform at the trenchant call of the Widow Wiggins. The sunny hair, passionate blue eyes and white, drawn face, not from stage-fright, but from an impelling sense of the sacredness of the hour, quite enthralled them. A suit of dark blue attested the critical taste of Snowdon. The change from the ragged

and ill-fitting garments he was wont to wear among them to the grooming of a young prince, quite took them as meteoric. Always a favorite with his imitations, he was now sure to be a star illuminative in the galaxy of the talent of the hills. Even the exacting widow felt a treat was coming which would not require her steerage and she forsook the helm and sat down with a reassuring smile, the first time that she had allowed the fret-work around her pursed mouth to relax that evening.

Allen now came out of seclusion bearing a violin. That caused another ripple of surprise. He took a position beside Ted and began tuning the instrument with the touch of an accustomed hand while expectation rose higher. When ready, he drew the bow lightly across the strings with a dexterity that surprised even Jim, curiously watching from his corner. Clear and sparkling flowed a melody that set feet to patting on the floor.

“Please bear in mind this is no dance,” warned the Widow Wiggins, irritably, as she sprang up. “I told you it was to be ‘The Carol of the Birds’; yes, birds as they sing on Christmas mornin’ in hot countries.” With that she subsided, but Allen had bowed on, deaf to her inquietude. The feet were still.

Ted began to whistle. Carol of the birds! Did the soul of the human warbler transmigrate into a lark soaring on dewy wing over a meadow in the dawning as he poured from his lips the liquid notes of that songster, heralding the first advent of day? How keen were the eyes that were on him; how wrapt the faces as the medley flowed on! There were the quaverings of the bob-o-link as he saucily swung on a weed by the wayside; the song of the robin in the appletrees; the oriole’s soft whistle as he busily wove and hung his nest in the maples down the lane; the bell-toll call of the hermit thrush in the wild-wood. They were carried back to springtime; nay, some of them in fancy roved sunnier climes and wondered if the birds were really more joyous there on Christmas mornings as it had been told to them.

When the sweet minstrelsy ended, so great was the wonder at the young performer that not a sound was heard as

he left the stage with backward bows. They were silent in tribute. Then did the Widow rise again and lodge the complaint that had it been the bray of a donkey they would have "slapped" their hands to blisters over the noise it made. O, versatile Widow! who had not yet learned that plaudits are not the truest appreciation.

Next she announced the coming of Santa. Yes, they were to have a real live Santa Claus, the supreme hour for the little ones.

A back window had been previously taken out and a long, steep chute built of boards had been arranged in lieu of a chimney. The outer end rested on high scaffolding reached by a ladder. O, joy! Sleighbells outside! He had come with reindeer and sledge! While the Widow was busy lecturing them on the decorum proper for his reception, the moment arrived and down he came. Ah! biff! Stars and blazing things! Santa had not reckoned with the top of the window and failed to duck his head. Just when they were expecting a jolly bound and a merry caper he struck the floor in a round forlorn heap—a podgy Santa with long snowy whiskers, a red cap and tassel and all that; but he lay quite still.

"Did some one bring a camphor bottle? shrieked the distressed Mrs. Wiggins, pouncing around.

"Calamity is sure to follow calamity! Who will assuage the grief of the Widow Cobb if he succumbs to the injury?" frantically cried Jerushy Henshaw as she rushed from her retreat and stood wringing her hands over the disseminator of toys, forgetting she was exposing a secret, the identity of Santa, which the Widow Wiggins had selfishly hugged to her bosom for weeks past.

"He always owned up I had a cow'n' five dollars when I married him," whimpered Aunt Ibbey to extol his virtues after she had raised his head, pulled off his cap and seen blood trickling from his hair.

Naturally there was much excitement and a heavy pressure of people toward the front to ascertain the extent of his injuries.

"It 'pears to be fairin' up some," was his reply to the question as to whether he were feeling better. "Swan, that

was the time I'd a had my brains knocked out if I'd a had any," he said looking around at the sympathizers. "You see I set on a sheepskin 'n' the boards was icy 'n' I was comin' like split when my head struck. Wonder it didn't crack it. Wal, that kind o' knocks the toy business out o' me for the evenin', so guess you may's well rope in somebody else, Mis' Wiggins, to pass around the gewgaws."

Thus Milton shed his disguise with his pack; and after he had been made as comfortable as it was possible to be with a very sore head, the presents were taken from the tree by Cad and Riley while Mrs. Wiggins handed them to several small boys for distribution as she barked off the names: "Zach Schadd. Arth Haddock. Zebulon Bass. Sary Crab. Henryette Fish. Eli Crane. Horatio Wolf. Mable Fox. Dan Lions. Rosette Catt. Samuel Beaver. Orlo Coon." Then, after the names of the animal kingdom had been exhausted, she came to the vegetable. "Milt Cobb"—and to him was presented a very artistic Hillside-Mooney doll which tallied to a nicety with his description of that strange goblin, dear to his heart. It did not fail of recognition.

"It's ben done by that d——d Allen, agin," he roared out and threw it at him.

This was wicked fun for the Ridge folks and the hour drove on with increasing merriment. Great was the interest when came the call: "The Baron of the Barrens." Snowdon received a bottle of petroleum with a nipple to imbibe it. And so it went till the time for closing arrived. Then the Widow rapped them to order. With no less asperity than marked former announcements, rather denouncements, she said: "We will now listen to a few remarks, well chosen we hope, by Mr. Allen, then consider ourselves dismissed pro tem. I am not informed as to the nature of his talk, but I assume it will be appropriate and very much to the point. Mr. Allen——" and she stiffly bowed an invitation for him to take the floor.

Cadmus ambled slowly forward, hands in his pockets, like a green, bashful schoolboy. Frequent rehearsals to the trees and rocks had failed to brace him with that

confidence he had anticipated. He weakened to the point where his limbs threatened to forsake him and let him down. His stored-up thoughts were as prone to scatter "as sparks are to fly upward." When he reached the stopping place and halted in position, thought had utterly deserted him. What were the first words? Could he recall them he might keep going. The blood rushed to his face. This and his hesitating attitude struck the audience as intentional and they roared again, to his increasing discomfiture. He believed he would be forced to sit down and let them carry the opinion he was practicing a farce. When they finally became quiet and he made some kind of odd noise in an attempt, they howled this time till the edifice threatened to collapse.

Jim Snowdon did not howl or even smile. Neither did the Widow Wiggins. Snowdon saw the fix the wag was in. Would he take advantage of the avenue of escape which the moment afforded and retreat, leaving the impression that he only intended farce. Snowdon hoped so. No? They stopped laughing and Allen still hung on. Presently, almost choking, he managed to blurt out, "Ye brainless people!"—then paused at his own voice as if thunderstruck. He had saluted them amiss. The nightingale had piped a full note out of tune. "Ye brainy people!" was what had been set down. Now what? Would he recall his words, would he change them, apologize? He stood a forlorn hope. His color changed from red to ashen. The Widow Wiggins spitefully threw a hymn-book at him but missed. In a tremulous voice of rage, old Milt Cobb cried out, "There now, can't that prove what I've allus told ye an' ye wouldn't believe me that he was a slip-p'ry, treacherous devil?" Thereupon the crowd rose to a man with an ugly rumble and surged toward the platform. Their intellectual pride had been outraged by a bumptious newcomer. To the end of time, Snowdon could never forget the sight: Cadmus making for the open back window, the Widow Wiggins screaming and holding onto his coat, until he slipped it to get free.

Snowdon lost no time in getting out, realizing he would amount to little more than a straw in the hands sary Crab. Henryette Fish. Eli Crane. Horatio Wolf.



of the angry Ridge men once they surrounded him. He ran around the house in the direction Cad had taken. It was quite light and he could see plainly, but no Cad. He gave a low familiar whistle, then listened. It was answered in kind from the pine grove beyond the clearing back of the building where the horses were sheltered. He ran into the dark cover and listened again. Then he heard Cad, not far away, his voice agitated and suppressed, "Here, Jim. This way."

When they met, it was too dark in the thick growth to discern even the outline of each other. Not a word was spoken between them. They listened. The only sounds around them were made by the horses as they occasionally stamped or pawed, the bells softly jingling. "What of Ted?" asked Cad. James did not answer. Before many moments had passed, the male element came pouring out of the house like hornets when the nest is punched. Loud and hoarse were the threatening voices that smote the night: "Show me the pair!" "Let me find 'em and I'll pulverize 'em!" "The cowards have skulked for the Barrens; we'll ketch 'em some day." At this last threat that came to their ears, James turned to go back but Cad caught him by the arm and pulled him after him, their way home leading on through the grove where the trail soon dropped down the steep hillside leading to Hazel Fork.

When they were far down the path toward the brook and the hoots and jeers behind them had nearly died away, Cadmus, in the lead, stopped beside a rock, then turned and faced Snowdon. The bushes around them were thin and the snow made it light enough for Snowdon to see plainly the face of his luckless friend. His disheveled hair, his paleness, his plucked form, made him look like a subject who had broken jail or, nearer, a madman who had escaped from an asylum. His eyes like burnt holes in a sheet were upon Jim, expecting some expression of censure. He had not erred from choice but he did not know that Snowdon was aware of it. His main concern was that he had brought down an avalanche

upon the head of the innocent James who had ever sought to guide his feet from pitfalls.

Snowdon was not a man given to excessive levity. Now, however, the sight of that rueful countenance and the memory of those wasted rehearsals were too much for him. To the astonishment of Cad he burst not into reproach but into peals of laughter. And he continued to be seized by spasms of mirth till he heard Ted's voice calling to them in fright from far up the hillside.

"Answer the poor kid, Cad," gasped Jim, then went off into a fresh fit of laughter.

When the frightened lad had overtaken them, he breathlessly managed to pant out, "Oh, Mr. Jim! Some of them swear they'll pull down the shanty over our heads!"

"Never fear, kiddie."

"It was Hannibal Hayhow," continued Ted, fearfully.

"We'll pacify Hannibal," Jim answered, reassuringly. "Now lead the line of march, chief speaker of the evening"—to Cadmus. "Come on, Ted. Nearly three miles of weary travel before we reach our haven of rest where we'll lay us down in fresh-earned laurels and to pleasant dreams."

"Riley don't believe Cad was in earnest," continued Ted innocently as they walked along.

"He was frightfully stage-struck," answered Jim. "The upshot over it won't amount to a hill of ants. Cadmus is of the variety that must learn the lessons of life by knocks and thumps. Take heed, Ted."

"'Tis an awful mess and country wide," ventured Cadmus, crestfallen.

"The whole country will be laughing. Nubbin Ridge is a small spot," added James in way of condolence. "Their rage will soon spend itself."

Up hill, down hill, they dragged their weary legs; but James would occasionally burst out laughing and Cad would set his lips grimly. When at last they reached the cabin door, fatigued as the Russian Bear at the end of a Hindenburg chase, James drew a deep breath and said: "It was worth it."

## XIX

### THE MYSTERIOUS CARD

On Christmas morning, the blue eyes of Jean Mac-Crea opened drowsily to find already a flood of sunlight upon the floor. The gas burning in the small heater had been lighted for some time for the room was warm.

“Dear auld Mither MacIntyre, pussy-footing in again not to disturb me,” she mentally said as she rose and began dressing. “She’s a jewel! Not even my own mother could take better care of me. Would an own mother warn me that all young men are false?” At this she naively smiled. “It cannot be true, surely. Oh, that reminds me, I have a present from one, from dear old Jim, of course, the package to be opened this morning.” And with that she crossed the floor to the chiffonier where it lay on the top. She opened it to find a small box lined with pink satin on which lay a very dainty gold necklace with a small heart locket. It was just what she had coveted and her eyes danced as it lay glistening in the palm of her hand. How delicate it looked! Then she must see the pretty presentment card, bound with holly-spray and berries, from Jim of course. She kissed it before she read it. Then the blood mounted to her cheeks in the surprise and disappointment for it read:

“To lovely Jean,  
—From Cad.”

“From Cad” and in Jim’s handwriting, no mistaking that! She threw it scornfully onto a stand nearby, then sank down into a rocking-chair and shaded her eyes with her hand.

“The presumptuous dolt! ‘From Cad!’ Very appropriate that name of his. He is one. He send me a

present! An absolute stranger! And to think Jim Snowdon wrote that card (fiercely she hurled it into the fire). Jim Snowdon. Yes, Auntie MacIntyre, I begin to believe. They are all false. Away goes—the confidence—the love—I—had for Jim.” And the flood gates opened.

After a time from below came the call, “Jean MacCrea! Jean MacCrea! Will ye no rise the day!” The voice was severe yet tender.

Jean sprang up. Yes, she would take the hated necklace down and show it to Auntie. She touched her eyes with her handkerchief and gathered up the chain. But the card. She regretted having burned it. Then she dragged slowly down the stairs.

Seated at the breakfast table, opposite Auntie, Jean held up the chain and tearfully explained.

“There, noo, Jean MacCrea!” Auntie burst forth, hitting her plate with her fork after the story was concluded. “There, noo, Jean MacCrea! I hae little peety for ye! Ye walked wi’ the eel wi’oot even an eentroduction. Ye waur ower bold an’ he thinks all bars are lowered. Wear the thing aboot me naik! Nae mair wad I waur the trinklet than a serpent coiled there. Jim Snowdon! An’ he wrote his card for him. Weel! Weel! He turns ye oor tae him like an auld toy a chiel is tired wi’. Th’ mair I see o’ men th’ beeter I like dogs I moost confess.”

With that Auntie fell to buttering a cake, with and without sympathy, while Jean pensively gazed at her untouched coffee for a long time in silence, then rose and left the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

And Jim Snowdon wondered and sorrowed the whole winter through; and both he and Cadmus were nonplussed when the chain came back to Cadmus without any explanation.

## XX

### THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

Jim Snowdon had seen hard winters in Scotland; but he was quick to yield the palm to that first dread winter in the northern hills of Pennsylvania after he had seen the fearful way Boreas cracked his whip over the wild and cheerless Barrens. Indeed, Boreas seemed in too deadly earnest with them. For miles, apparently, he carried snow only to pile it in billowy heaps upon the hills. If he and Cad shoveled out, Boreas was sure to rise in fury the following night, lash the cabin and dash fresh and higher heaps around it. They were doomed to hibernate so far as work was concerned. Of all things in nature around them, only the spring kept active. When Boreas sometimes wearied into sleep, it was a solace to them in the night-time to lie awake and hear the water rippling from beneath Big Ben, lying half buried in his white bed. Times there were when the larder had grown scant, and often, too, the fuel would be hard to get. This would cause Jim, gloomy as Hiawatha, in his wigwam famine pressed, to say, "Let's go down to the low country and pass the rest of it." In response to the move, Cadmus, for Ted boarded at Henshaws' and attended school, would always give his head a wary, negative shake for he shunned the open country since his fall, though Riley had succeeded fairly well in convincing the outraged people of Nubbin Ridge that the wag had blundered from sheer embarrassment. So he was content to weave and to carve the chairs he was making and hunt and visit his traps when the weather suffered him to go forth, which was not often.

At times, Snowdon grew seriously moody; and then he would upbraid Cadmus for tampering with the package sent to Jean. But the manner in which Cad would

protest his innocence, his open and troubled cast of countenance, his "honor brights" always baffled Snowdon into silence and left them both to wonder and to worry on.

They seldom saw Riley; and Milt not once, the long winter through. However they received a special message from him that if Allen had seen fit to meet his death, he would waggle over and assist in helping lay out the remains, owing to the deep respect he had for him. This caused the only laughter on Cad's part in which Snowdon had seen him indulge since he parted with Milt at the Christmas tree. Ted did not often get home. When he came, Jim had difficulty in persuading him to return to school. That he eclipsed Solon Cipher for brilliancy was evident to Snowdon. He also realized that the stream never rises higher than the source and early began to plan to send Ted to Petrolia the coming year.

And so the winter dragged monotonously on, Cad wishing it would rain boiling water.

Not until late in March did the weather make any decided turn. One morning they awoke to find the atmosphere stifling warm in the cabin and to hear the rain pouring on the roof. Welcome rain! Spring with her warm breath had come in the night without warning and evicted roaring Boreas, giving him fast chase to his home back in the far north. Impatiently she ravaged his work with an almost continuous rain for a whole week. The rills trickling down the ravines of the hillsides were changed to roaring, foaming torrents which quickly raised the streams over their banks in the lowlands and sent a deluge down upon the towns below. Even Milt Cobb's spring run was high. The underpinning on one side of his chicken-coop washed out and left the coop on a tilt. Sulphurous were the oaths poured out at the discovery. And Jerushy Henshaw's spring forgot to babble in its place and rose rampant around the house.

The thaw brought Ted home with grim determination to remain. All the persuasive powers that Snowdon could call into play, failed to convince him he was not needed

till school closed. During the interim that they waited for the roads to settle or freeze up again, the unfinished room of the cabin was to be completed and the lad stoutly maintained he could be of much service in the work. Cad espoused his cause, so, finally, James reluctantly yielded. Then the odd trio started work, Ted and Lark usually in the way, and with Riley's help the kitchen was soon finished. It enlarged accommodations wonderfully and, best of all, it made way for Ted to have a bed all to himself.

The weather did not clear. April held high carnival. Between her occasional smiles of sunshine, she wept copious tears of joy. In the copses the buds swelled, the green ferns uncurled and the flowers poked up bright inquisitive heads. She early called her song birds and sent the wild geese honking overhead toward the far Canadian lakes. The earth grew water-soaked till it became spongy beneath the feet. Cad would impatiently declare every time that he was chased in by a fresh shower that it was high time to begin work on birch bark canoes. Jim chafed. No coal could be had till the ground dried and that would take a long time after the weather cleared. But they began work. Between showers, with pick and shovel, they dug into the steep hillside above the derrick and leveled off several yards of ground space.

"What's it for?" Ted asked as he came along from an excursion in the woods with dog and gun and saw the two viewing it at its completion, well satisfied.

"It's the devil's thrashing floor. Git for the cabin, young man, for here comes another shower," Allen answered as he shouldered a pick and ran for the derrick.

That was as much satisfaction as the boy ever got when he questioned Cadmus about it. Jim always looked mysterious and said, "Wait and see," when he tried him. But the lad's curiosity knew no bounds when one morning he ran down to the well, after the rains had abated and the road was passable, to find that a team and wagon had been up the trail during the night. Riley, the day before, had brought coal, and steam was up in the boiler

ready to start the drill again. He expected to find this. But he did not expect to see a small shanty standing on the "devil's thrashing floor" with a narrow door facing the derrick, padlocked. It got there in the night, somehow, for he had left there late the evening before and nothing showed then. He made the discovery before he reached the derrick and stood looking at the newcomer, in deep bewilderment.

"It's a mushroom," volunteered Cadmus, calling from the derrick where he was busy getting ready to sharpen the drill. "Bring on that coffee and don't fall over your feet looking at our new neighbors."

They had breakfasted early and the boy had been instructed to bring them a lunch at ten o'clock. He walked on with his basket, set it down on the floor and betook himself back toward the cabin again without a question—chief cook and housekeeper now that business was booming. When round a curve, where the bushes hid him from view, he stopped, looked back and commented, "Them two are peaches! Wonder what in Texas they've got in that pen? How did the bloomin' thing git there? If they done it, it was when I was asleep last night. I noticed they looked awful tired this mornin' but I s'posed they'd woke up in the night and had another fight over Jean MacCrea as usual. But where'd they git their boards to build it with? Mebby the fairies brought it. I didn't b'lieve in any of that bunk that Solon Cipher read to us, but mebby it's true after all. Ah, fairies! Fiddlesticks! I'll know what's in that callaboose before a week is over but I won't peach nothin' on 'em. They've been too good to me to do that." With that he walked on busy with his thoughts, forming a plan to penetrate the house of mystery.

Next morning Riley Henshaw came over with his team. Jim had engaged him to "log off" a field on the flat hill-top above Big Ben for potatoes and Ted was to cut the scattered bushes. As they worked, Ted failed to draw Riley into conversation, something unusual, for always before he had fraternized very freely with the boy. Ted



observed his unaccustomed look of perplexity, and after a time, to make a probe at the cause, he asked:

“Riley, did you notice down there by the derrick when you come up past there this mornin’ that shack that our folks has built?”

“Yes, Ted, I did. But how and when did they git the lumber? Did you see who brought it?” he asked, his brow clearing, for he felt perhaps a way had opened to gain news. Then he dropped his lines and sat down on the log he was hauling.

“Search me,” said Ted, dropping down beside him. “I thought mebby you did. If you didn’t, then it would confound the Oracle of Delphi, as Solon Cipher would say, how that shack got there and what it’s for.”

“Wasn’t you aroun’ when they built it?” queried Riley.

“I’m as much in the dark about it as you are. An’ if you didn’t bring the lumber, then I b’lieve I’ll leave ’em, for I begin to b’lieve the cusses are hoodoos. They couldn’t have carried the boards from any place an’ set it up in one night.”

“’Tain’t so bad’s that,” responded Riley. “I seen wagon tracks all the way up the road ahead of me that I never made. An’ it was all done night afore last, hey?”—not so much a question for the boy as a poser for himself. Then he conclusively added: “Well, whatever ’tis, ’tain’t for me to know else they’d a had me haul the lumber. I b’lieve they was two teams come up that night by the looks of the tracks. They never mentioned a thing about it to me this mornin’ when we was standin’ right by it an’ I alookin’ at it while we was talkin.’ Guess they’s a nigger behind the woodpile all right.”

“I’m scared of the thing, honest I am, Riley. When they wouldn’t tell me what was in the coop first time I see it after it had lit there, I made up my mind I’d watch a chance when they wasn’t round and pry a board loose ’n’ see. They wouldn’t know if you drove it back tight. It can’t be done. Last night, they had the well all lit up with jacks an’ one of ’em roosted there while the other slept in the cabin. They took turns at it. Say, Riley, I’m ’fraid——.” He seated himself closer beside the man on

the log, beseeching protection. "It has got Milt Cobb's Hillside-Mooney skinned forty ways. I seen Lark sniffin' through the cracks round the thing an' he wouldn't do that 'less there was somethin' live in there. Once I'm sure I heard a moan come out of it. They've got some one in there, I'm sure. Wish't I could go home with you, Riley."

"Don't they say a word to you about it?" cross-questioned Riley.

"When I ast Cad agin this mornin' what 'twas, he told me it was the death house an' not go foolin' round it. Jim don't say anything."

Riley caught an idea and jumped up. "You stick by old Jim, Ted. He's O. K. every time. Nothing in the shack to hurt you, I bet. Jest don't want you carryin' clash round to the neighbors. Quit your worryin' and don't be pryin' into things that don't concern you an' you won't have any news for them as would injure Jim. Others will be tryin' to find out what's in there 'fore the thing's over, but he don't intend they shall. He'll have to bees-wax cracks if he keeps old Milt Cobb's eyes from borin' through. Jim Snowdon is still as a clam but he's sharper than a hook. He's set out to defeat that old reptile in Petrolia and he'll do it. He's honest an' fair, I can see, with them that are so with him. Woe unto them, though, that ever try to gouge him. He's the type that won't stay gouged long. Boy, you foller Jim Snowdon and trust him and you'll wear diamonds. He thinks a heap of you." Then Riley grew reflective. "Tell you somethin', Ted. Shouldn't wonder if that shack holds guns and shells. If oil is found there's goin' to be war in these hills. Well, git ap, Mag,"—to the horses. "We must clear Jim a tater patch."

Riley's talk served to allay Ted's fears. Not all of his incredulity fled at once, however; it had become too deep-seated. Trying to clear away the mists, he failed to remember to rise when Riley spoke to the horses and so was jerked from the log with such celerity that it nearly dis-jointed his neck. Riley was too engaged with the lines to look back and see him sprawling on the ground. "Say, Henshaw," he called, raising his head and alluding to

Riley's speech, "you ought to go to Congress. You've got the gift."

At the log heap where Riley was strenuously heaving at the log, Ted came up and said, while he lent his strength, "If there's goin' to be war in these hills, I ain't goin' to stay an' cook their beans for 'em to fight. I'll light out while the goin' is good."

When the log was in place, Riley looked at him deliberately and answered, "If there's war, I'm goin' to be right here and take a hand. That Hayhow is mixin' in it an' I 'low to stand with the boys."

"They're fightin' between 'emselves, now," responded Ted. "Wake up in the night an' call each other a few."

Riley surveyed him, curiously. "What they scrappin' over? Thought they was thicker, always, than three in a bed."

"Scrappin' over Jean MacCrea."

"Who the devil is Jean MacCrea?" and Henshaw's eyes dilated.

Ted swallowed hard and hesitated. "W'y she's Jane MacCray. She's a girl in Petrolia, a girl that come from Scotland with Jim, a girl that he's always looked after."

This was a revelation. "An' Cad wants 'er I s'pose."

The boy looked troubled and was silent. Then he ventured, "Say, Riley, I got mixed up in it, too, and I'd better cut sticks out o' here 'fore they find it out. They'd kill me if they knew."

"Well, I'll be ———. How are you twisted in the jangle?"

Riley sat down on a stump. In a quiet voice, but compelling, he had asked the question. The boy faltered. His face told that he was deeply troubled. "I ain't fool 'nough to peach my own secrets," at length he answered. "Solon Cipher drilled us on this verse:

"Your peace of mind on this depends:  
Tell not your secret to your friends;  
For when your friends become your foes,  
Then all the world your secret knows."

and told us to practice it."

Even Riley's unpracticed eye detected the set and unusual deliberation in the boy's face. Small things interest small minds most, and Riley could not exist without that secret. And as for the girl, he was now in love with her himself. He left his seat and came over where the boy was standing and took his hand. Then in a sympathetic and confiding voice, he swore by all that was holy that he would forever keep the secret if only Ted would share it with him; and added, too, he was strongly of the opinion that he could overcome the difficulty. He squeezed Ted's hand to worm himself further into his confidence. The boy remembered the past: Riley always had been kind to him. He yielded.

"Well, Jim got a Christmas present for the girl. It was in a little box an' I saw where he kep' it. I wanted to see the thing, so one day when they was both out, I opened 'er up. It was all fixed for sending, but I knew I could tie it up again just as I found it. It was a gold chain an' locket an' a sleek little card sayin' who from and to who. I knew he was goin' to send it to her by Cad an' a thought struck me to have some fun, for there was some more cards where I found the box an' I could take one and copy Jim's handwritin'—I can copy writin' as well as I can mock birds—makin' it a present from Cad to Jean. She'd think when she opened it 'at Cad couldn't write. Cad is always botherin' me an' this would be a return crack. I done the thing up again as I had found it an' the mornin' we all went to Comfort, Cad on his way to Petrolia to deliver the thing, I thought I'd die a laffin' every step of the way. Well, I changed my tune when the box came back in a few days an' struck our hill and exploded. Say, you've seen an old pair of tomcats settin' lookin' at each other an' yowlin', jest wantin' and waitin' to git at each other's eyes! It grows worse all the time. Cad swears every time Jim breaks out, that he didn't monkey with the box. But some day I b'lieve Jim will reach over an' claw 'im. Cad's afraid."

He got no further for at this point of the story Henshaw dropped to the ground and rolled with laughter. Ted looked dolefully at him, ready to burst into tears; this was

a friend's sympathy. Riley, observing the effect of his laughter, managed to say, "You little devil, you need killing, but I'm going to get you out of it. If I can't, you come to Henshaws'."

"You don't think they can send me to jail?"

"If we were never to tell, they would have to furnish proof first. It's no criminal offense anyway as the box was not in the mails when you got in your work. Worst that could happen to you, would be to lose your home. But quit your droopin' over it. Come on, let's git to work."

"But if they git to poundin' each other right under my nose?"

"Take it from me, they won't. In their case, Cad realizes a good run would be a mighty sight better than a poor stand. He'll git out o' Jim's reach. Come on, now."

"But if Jim takes him in bed? Then's when the fever seems to come onto him strongest," remonstrated Ted, hanging back.

"They're too busy with the well now to scrap. Other excitement may be coming soon to engage their entire thoughts. I heard Jim say he was goin' to Petrolia now in a few days. Likely he'll straighten it all out with what's-her-name when he goes. Git to work an' you'll forgit your troubles. An' I'll try to think up a way out of it. Come."

Despite Riley's assurance the boy yet lingered as if rooted to the ground. From far down the hillside came the deep thud of the drill, pounding its way through earth and rock, down to poverty or fortune for Snowdon. For, when a few days before Cad had taken the chairs, his winter's work, to Petrolia and sold them and turned the proceeds over to Jim, Ted then realized that Jim's money was gone. Yet he had not closed a charitable hand to those around him before the last penny was spent. Not till the metallic ring of the bit came up as Cad hammered it, did Ted fully sense the spell of horror that bound him. The sounds of their labor smote him. He had sinned against those who had befriended him. True, he had not realized the enormity of the act at the time he playfully

did the mischief. But it had come to him now and stood over him like a pall. At any time the approaching storm might break. Could he cloak his guilt and witness Cad maligned—witness the chord of friendship snapped forever between those two good pals? He felt he should go to them and clear up the mystery, removing all bitter feeling, but where could he rest his own case? Would they beat him and turn him out? Worse than that perhaps. He had heard of the use of “tar and feathers” and the thought struck him that they might resort to that punishment. He dare not confess. It was settled with him then and there: he would leave.

He started for the cabin like a hunted deer. Down through the bushes he tore, unheeding the scratches his face received from branches and when he stumbled and fell, his head hitting a stone and making an ugly bruise on his forehead, he did not feel the pain, but rose and rushed madly on. At the door of the cabin the dog came running to meet him. He put Lark aside without a caress for the first time since his coming there to live, then entered the place that had welcomed him when in tribulation—the home that was to know him no more. A glance at the clock on the mantel told him it was not yet eleven. Time to dress and get away before either of them would come for dinner. After quickly washing his hands and face he was ready. He had brought nothing there save the ragged garments he wore and would carry nothing with him. He possessed a small amount of money that his kind benefactors had given him and now it burnt his hands as he counted it over. His next act was to snatch a piece of paper and a pencil from Jim’s desk and write a farewell note. It briefly read:

“God bless you, Jim and Cad. I’m leaving. I can’t stay here any longer. I’ve wronged you. I fixed all the trouble you’ve had over that chain to Jean MacCrea. In a few days I think you’ll hear how I done it. Well, good-bye, boys, and don’t quarrel any more and be good to Lark for me.

“Your loving frien’,

“Ted Atwater.

“P. S. Ast Riley about the chain and Jean. This is in the year of our Lord 19—jest before the well comes in. T. A.”

The note he pinned on the outside of the door after closing it behind him. There was a suffocating quality in his despair as he turned away, his misery too deep for tears and only increased by Lark, approaching again with downcast head and drooping ears and coaxingly wagging his tail. Down on his knees, irresistibly, dropped the boy. He threw his arms around the dog's neck and suffered him to lick his cheek: brute affection never wavers as does that of the human race. Tear-drops began to well up to his eyes despite a struggle to keep them back and he brokenly faltered, “Well, good-bye, Lark, old fellow. You'n I have hunted and romped together for the last time. We sure did have some good times together, you'n me. Seem's if my heart would break to leave you but I got so I don't deserve even a dog's company any more. I'm glad you don't know the stunt I pulled off on the boys after they fed me and let me sleep between 'em. I sure acted nasty. Now I'm goin' for it. Don't foller me this time. Stay here an' watch the cabin. Well, I got to light out before one o' them comes.”

After giving the dog an extra caress, he rose and started but the resolute look he tried to force was bitter. Turning the corner of the cabin, he looked back again. The dog's eyes, pleading to follow as of old, sent a pang to his young heart, the bitterest he had felt in life since that agonizing time he had witnessed the closing of the coffin lid over his mother's face. He was leaving. The thought came to him as he neared the spring that it might be wiser to remain, confess his folly and beg forgiveness, than to face the world, an outcast begging for shelter and bread? Suddenly there rose in his mind a vivid remembrance of that vision during sleep, wherein he had seen his mother and followed her spirit out of the wilderness and darkness to Jim. And now in the face of this, he had committed a great fault and was running away from him. The thought retarded his steps. But it quickly gave away again to fear. That forthcoming confession would reveal the many times that

he had sat mute while Jim reviled Cad who bore the opprobrium silently, patiently hoping for a day to come when the shrouded situation would clear. For neither of the injured parties could screw his courage to the sticking point to inquire of Jean why she had sent the gift flying back to Allen without even an explanation. It had dropped back into the camp like a bomb. No, he would go on.

Stopping at the spring, he knelt down and took a swallow of the sweet waters for the last time. As he rose, his next farewell was to Big Ben, that great and wonderful rock now crowned with the verdure of smiling spring. While he tarried, there came a long-drawn wail from Lark which sent him flying on down the path, wiping tears and struggling with the great lump that had risen in his throat and which threatened to choke him. Soon he came to the wagon road that led down past the well. He stopped. To follow this for any length, was to risk meeting some one coming up. Thus he chose a circuitous route below the road, through the growth, keeping well out of sight of the men at work in the derrick. As he was passing near them, he heard Jim call to Cad in the engine house that it was time to shut down. On he bounded through the woods, for the thought of discovery put new fear into him and he did not emerge again into the beaten track till far down the hillside. When he did, panting and limping, for he had fallen and hurt one of his legs, he wore a hunted look as he glanced back up the hill. He then turned and ran on down the road, distraught by self-inflicted sorrow.



## XXI

### WHEREIN OLD MILT PRESENTS A DUAL FACE

“Where be ye, Jim? Wake up, Jim. Where’s a light?”

It was evening and dark as Tophet in the cabin. The voice belonged to Milt Cobb. He had forced an entrance some way and was falling over chairs and floundering around, ostensibly in quest of a match.

“There! Guess I’ve rammed my hand down into the pancake batter! Yes ’n’ upset the crock!” was his next splutter. “Cad told me down at the well, I’d find ye in here asleep an’ to walk right in an’ light a light; told me where I’d find the matches but, hell, I’m all over batter now an’ I might as well look for a needle in a haymow as to try to find anything in here. There! I’ve upset somethin’ else! What a ye want to keep yer pails ’n’ jars settin’ round on the floor for? Hey, Jim! Wake up, Jim!”

Then he listened. No silence was ever deeper than that around him. It mocked him. He became exasperated. “Well, be ye dead, Jim? *If ye be, speak!*” This last brought results.

“Is that you, Milt?” came a sleepy call, a heavy voice from the apartment across the hall. Jim had been aroused from a lethargic sleep from which his very bones ached.

“’Tain’t anybody else,” was the curt reply. “An’ I want to tell ye, Jim, I’m in one hell of a fix out here an’ dass’nt move. When ye bring out a light, ye’ll kick me out o’ the house, I s’pose. ’Pears like I’ve upset, split, ’n’ smashed ev’rything ye’ve got in the cabin out here in the dark. If I’d a cut such a flop to home as this, Iby would a sent the tea-kettle flyin’ at my head.”

When Snowdon appeared in the doorway with a lamp his face wore a jaded, haggard aspect. Milt took it that

he himself was the immediate cause of the changed appearance.

"Gawd, Jim forgive me," he began. "I jest come up from Comfort and brought a lot o' mail fer ye and Cad hustled me on up from the boiler house with it, thinkin' there'd be somethin' among it ye'd be in a hurry to git. D'ever ye see sich a lookin' place as I've turned this into, Jim?"

Jim certainly had not. There stood old Milt beside the table, one hand yet dripping with batter, crock upset, the contents spread over the top and a large amount in a thick puddle on the floor. Chairs were upset; in fact, most of the furnishings were in a state of keel upward.

As Snowdon's eyes widened at what appeared unbelievable, old Milt forecasted trouble. In a conciliatory way he began, "I'll give ye five dollars to settle it."

"I'll give you five dollars if you will convince me you did all this alone in so short a time," was the cool reply.

"Had ye anything else for breakfast, Jim?" Milt had dropped in to stay over night.

"Potatoes."

Then Snowdon found his way in, deposited the lamp on one corner of the table and began to clean up. He had told a truth. There was nothing left in the cabin to eat save potatoes and a few crackers. While he was working in not any too amiable a frame of mind, the guest found his way without further disaster over to a wash-basin in a corner of the room and as he purged his guilty hands, ventured the remark that he had better go on home now after all, though he didn't know how he was to find his way through the woods in the dark.

"You are not going, I hope, to let this accident alter your plans, Uncle Milt. We would greatly enjoy your society over night and at a potato breakfast, providing you slip out early in the morning with a shot gun and add a crow to the bill of fare. So, Mr. Cobb, make yourself perfectly at home as heretofore, though the accommodations be a bit crude with fair prospects of a famine. I've alum left in the cupboard with which to pucker the void

to fit the menu. Did you say you had some mail for me?" inquired Jim as he finished wiping up.

"My pockets are fairly bulgin' with it!" exclaimed Milt. His face lighed up, and he commenced to fumble around in his pockets.

"Wait," said Jim. "Let's go into the other room first. Then I'll run it over. Oh, yes; I nearly forgot essentials. Have you had supper, Milt?"

"No, nor don't deserve any after upsettin' my trough an' tearin' up my pen. Honest, Jim, I never felt so bad over anything sence the day I went over to Hayhows' an' slipped on an apple-pealin' layin' on the floor an' set back down into a tub o' butter settin' on a bench that the ole womern had just finished packin'. She riz me quicker'n lightnin' with a stick o' wood—took me right over the eye an' I'll carry the scar long's I live."

"I've nothing but crackers now, Milt, but at least you won't die of starvation while you're eating them," apologized Jim already on his way to the buffet. "Stock of grub has got low. Hustling to get the well finished. But we'll have to go out to-morrow for provision."

"Cad told me to tell ye to come down quick's ye could. Thought when I left they had just struck the sand."

Jim placed a dish of crackers and a cup of cold coffee on the table. As Milt viewed the meager fare, so different from anticipation, he said, "I have been young and now am old; yet have I not seen the rightchus forsaken, nor his seed beggin' bread. I hadn't ought to have this much, Jim. But where's your boy?"

"Run away." And Snowdon turned his head to hide his sorrow.

"That so. 'Twan't a bad idee," returned old Milt, passing upon it lightly. "Am I settin', eatin' my supper, on one of the famous chairs, that they tell me Cad made?" he inquired.

"No; Cad sold 'em," keeping his face averted.

"Want to know. How much did they bring in?"

"Ten dollars apiece. Sixty dollars." But he didn't explain that they had been living on the proceeds for the

past month. "Give me the mail, Milt. I'll read while you eat."

Milt produced it: one solitary letter and postmarked Petrolia, the handwriting very familiar. Snowdon's heart gave a bound. To hear from Jean at last! Riley had told him what took Ted away and he had intended to get to Petrolia at the first possible moment but imperative work on the well held him captive at the time. Thus he had bided wakeful hours until he could have an opportunity to go and explain. And now she had sent a letter.

"I'll go into the other room while you munch your crackers," he said, switching on the electric lights.

"That's right," said Milt. "I'll need plenty o' light to survey all this spread," and chuckled. But Jim's ears were deaf to the remark for by the time it fell he had bounded across the alley and in the adjoining compartment was tearing open the missive. His heart beat like a trip hammer!

"Petrolia, May 10th, 19—.

"My dearest and much misunderstood Jim:

"For I can say this after the horrible winter I have passed. Oh, if only you had come to me after the gift was returned! I know it all now. We are holding captive one of the finest little boys but he is wild to be up and away. He has told me—well, he says just for you to inquire of Mr. Hen-Hen-Hen-house (I guess it is) and he will tell you all that happened to cause my distrust and misery.

"Who ever saw Auntie MacIntyre laugh? No one, I think, until I brought her in and had her listen to Ted's confession. And when he had finished and made ready to limp away again (he is very lame from a fall) what unexpected thing did she further do but catch him round the neck with her arms and say, 'Ye'll no gae oot West tae yeer brither! Ye'll 'bide richt waur ye've oonloaded yeer sin, if sin it be, till yeer weel an' unco' happy ance mair. A'm struck wi' yeer honeesty. Gin A' had a laddie like yirsel' tae work for ance mair, me' days wad be brighter. Coom, noo, tae yeer room an' gin th' wild men cam' doon frae th' hills in pursuit, it's Mrs. MacIntyre an' them for a fast mile. They'll nae harm ye for a good joke, A'm

thinkin'. Coom, noo,' and she led him upstairs to his room. And then what did she do with him but lead him by the hand, afternoon and evening, to the picture shows lest he escape from her. Truly the poor old lady has gone daffy over the boy.

"What shall we do with him? Send him back? Of course, I know you will say yes. He has the whole neighborhood around us wild with his warbles. Jim, he's a genius. Well, we will keep him right here till we hear from you. Don't be in a hurry. He has told me that you are working almost frantically now to finish the well and, Jim, some good fairy whispers to me you are to be an oil king. Hail the day! You deserve it.

"Lovingly,

"Jean."

Before Jim had reached the end of the letter, all the deep shadows on his face and the tired lines had vanished. At the conclusion, he gave a wild leap for the door.

"What in hell's the matter now?" exclaimed old Milt, looking after him. Down the road, through the darkness he went, tearing like a madman, and when he bounded onto the derrick floor with a whoop, Cad and Riley, who were busy at the drill, recoiled much as if a scalping Apache had swooped down on them.

"Shut down, Riley," commanded Jim, handing Cad the letter.

Henshaw rushed to throttle the engine. After everything had been brought to a lull and Cad had finished reading, Henshaw, owl-eyed, stood to watch their antics. Sober Jim Snowdon! What had turned his head that night! The pair bear-hugged, they fox-trotted, they goose-stepped.

Presently, however, they slowed down, and Snowdon became himself again. "Go up to the cabin, Riley, and turn in. You will have old Milt for company but chain him to a bed-post when you want to sleep. Ted's coming home," was the parting and partial explanation of their capers.

"Good!" ejaculated Riley for he, too, had deep affection

for the boy. "Never fear about old Milt. I'll chloroform him," and he swung off up the road by the aid of a flashlight, for the night was becoming black as ink. At midnight, he would go on tour again and relieve Cad.

When he got to the cabin, he expected to find a delectation of hot cakes and steaming coffee, for which the house was celebrated. Jim had not posted him in regard to the paucity of rations after Milt had cavorted like a bull in a china shop. A look into the kitchen now convinced him he must partake of cold lunch. When he slammed the cupboard door upon finding empty shelves he heard old Milt's voice from the room across the way, calling for his benefit—

"Old Mother Hubbard  
She went to the cupboard  
To git her poor dog a bone."

Henshaw's mind was a confusion of thoughts as he plunged over toward old Milt. As a wary old woodchuck, upon the approach of an intruder dives into his hole in the earth, likewise did the crafty old Milton scurry in among the bed covers when Riley appeared.

"Did you have anything to eat here tonight?" was the menacing injunction.

"Not in such awful large and rich portions as would cause dispepsy or—we'll say gout. Don't have an idee you'll have to call Doc Merriweather afore mornin' to relieve me."

"Wonder what it means. Men work on their stomachs," mused Riley disappointedly.

Then Milt manfully poked out his head and confessed the lamentable accident which had robbed them of their fare.

"If I'd a been Jim I'd a had the satisfaction of rubbin' your nose in the batter, anyway," avowed Riley at the conclusion. "Them two fellers, me with 'em, workin' ev'ry ounce that's in us to finish that well by tomorrow anyway, an' you come prowlin' in here in the dark an' git in your work. You goin' to lay there an' sleep over it be you? If

they hain't enough gumption to rout you before you do somethin' else, I'll dip you in the pond in the mornin'."

"Jest hold yer wild hosses, Cap'n Henshaw," irritably fired old Milt in return. "Leave that flash-light somers here by the bed where I c'n git a holt of it an' you git inter bed. I'll see to it that there's breakfast here a plenty," and he rolled over in a way which meant an end to further parley.

Riley knew him to be a man of very prolific resources when in straits and one who would attain his ends by ways either fair or foul. He would not scruple to beg, borrow, or thief when hunger pinched. But in this case, with the nearest point of aid three miles away and night over them, Riley was dubious. Nothing to do but trust old Milt for it, so he undressed and crawled into bed beside him. Milt was snoring loudly and peacefully when his own eyes closed in last remembrance. Tired, though hungry, he slept like a log, slept till the gray of morning came stealing in at the window. He would have chosen to sleep longer but a shout broke in upon his dreams.

"Would you lie here in slothful slumber wrapt when the Baron has found oil?" It was Cad. He was bending over him.

After a strenuous tussle with Morpheus, Riley succeeded in partially shaking off the cleaving adversary, and drowsily answered, "What is all the oil in the world to satisfy a gnawing stomach? I'm so hungry I could swallow Big Ben. Where is Milt, the old Anaconda? I see he is out of bed."

"Look over there in the corner," whispered Cad.

There rested Milton, chief commissary of the subsistence department, in a reclining chair, very much asleep. In that recumbent position, with mouth agape toward them, he exhibited several scattered but very yellow, ferocious looking teeth.

"If its eyes were open I wouldn't be long in climbin' a tree," laughed Riley. "His hat's on. He must a been out coonin' in the night. But I'm so hungry, Cad, I can't rise."

"Don't stop to dress, Riley, but come out into the

kitchen. You'll say of the good old man, 'Oh, Milt, live forever!'"

There it lay on the table and no mistaking, a large smoked ham and beside it two large loaves of fine looking bread.

"And see here, Riley," said Cad, displaying a hat half-full of pheasant's eggs. "I've been watching her for some time. I found the nest under a turned-up root on Big Ben the other day. She would have layed two or three more before setting so I know they're good. Oh boy, think of ham and eggs for breakfast? Yes, and fried potatoes, bread and coffee! Hurrah for Milton Cobb!"

"Oh, Milt, live forever!" shouted Riley, making a try at buck and wing.

And suffice to say the odor of that unexpected breakfast in the preparation would have whetted the appetite of the most over-fastidious epicurean. Slices of delicious home-cured ham! Pheasant eggs, fried in the gravy! In the skillet, brown potatoes! Milton's heavy slumber was not deep enough to repell it and it brought him to the fore in good time.

"Me for provider an' you for cook, Cad, we would a won the favor of Cleopatry," he said smiling that raccoon smile of his as he took the proffered seat at the head of the table. "Where's Jim?"

"I've saved the choicest for him. As soon as we take a wolf's fill, Riley and I will hike to the well and relieve him. He's on picket duty."

"Got 'er down?" queried Milt, shoveling ham and potatoes.

"You follow Riley and me and see. And, Riley, Jim wants you to go home and get your car and make it to Petrolia on the wings of the wind. Important business. I'll take him pencil and paper and you are to deliver the messages. Gobble fast, Milt."

After the meal was dispatched with a relish known only to woodsmen after a fast, the young men double-quickened down to the well with old Milt close behind, for, despite his years, with the shambling gait of a bear he covered the distance and landed even with them upon the derrick



floor. Upon their precipitous arrival, Jim came out of the engine-house and with his characteristic composure, nodded a good-morning.

"They tell me ye've struck it, Jim," panted the old man, beginning to look around.

"Sure he has that. Look in that pail," cried Riley. A wooden bucket which stood by the casing was filled with amber oil of that heavy grade used for lubricating purposes. Oil was spattered round about and over the floor, evidence of a rich find. Riley and Milt were quick to examine a pail of sand-pumpings which revealed a coarse clover-seed sand saturated with the thick wealth. Outside the derrick, there it lay in abundance where the sand-pump had been dumped. Accompanied by Cad they were flying around uttering excited ejaculations while Jim sat composedly writing.

"W'y gosh all hemlock, Jim!" roared old Milt hopping everywhere. "These old worthless Barrens, Jim! To turn ye into—but." He paused at an after-thought and looked squarely at him.

"But! Yes, *but*, Milt. To turn me into trouble for a time at least. Come here, all of you, and stand before me," he said rising. "I've something to impart stronger than requests this time," his tones impelling with that strange power of command peculiar to the man.

Promptly they lined up and Milton gave a ludicrous salute that set them all laughing.

"Now," continued Jim, "the crux of my affairs no doubt will soon be reached. You gentlemen are aware that my rights to the oil interest on the Barrens may be contested; more than that, the ownership of the land. In this hour, I need help. Before I entreat your support in my fight, I will go over, briefly, the facts in the case, clearing the mystery why I happen to be involved in a skirmish with my uncle in Petrolia.

"Two brothers, not three as in the stories, back in Scotland were early left to shift for themselves after the death of their parents. The brothers were James Bruce Snowdon, my father, and his younger brother, John. John early drifted to America and rose to be an enviable financier of

much reputed wealth while my father, more plodding, succeeded well as a weaver back in his own country. By shrewdness and thrift he became the owner of many cloth mills. But always the letters from his brother in the New World, relating quick fortunes made from mines, oil and timber, had a great glamor for him. And this grew as the letters came from time to time. Wealth seemed to be his sole ambition. He read much of Carnegie. I was an only child and he longed for me to be rich when I grew up. After the death of my mother, the desire waxed stronger within him. He confided much of this to his brother, perhaps made requests, for a letter came telling of a vast tract of timber and oil land for sale on which my uncle held an option. Since he already had more prospects than he could handle he was willing to let it go. My father quickly bit. The price was half a million. My father put his possessions on the block, sold at a depreciated value, raised the money and played into my uncle's hands.

"And then, later, I came to enter into my inheritance. With what pleasure did I read my deed for the Barrens, upon my arrival, you ask? When the purchase was effected, a paper, an option, was granted to the grantor (the Newark Oil Company) that if they so desired they might reclaim the land within the period of ten years by refunding purchase money with interest. Now my uncle cunningly brought this all about. My father had intrusted him with power of attorney, thus he was free to act. He then purchased that option for a trifle. There is a clause in my deed which makes it subject to that option. The purchase money principally went into my uncle's hands, I am convinced, and some day I will be able to prove that it did. Not now, but the time is coming.

"We quarreled, yes. I went to Oklahoma. I could not bring myself to tell my father of the dupe at the time. My uncle wrote him that I was a wayward profligate with a wanderlust and would soon depart with my fortune. When I learned of it and my father's grief, I began preparations to return to Scotland; but before I could earn money sufficient for the voyage, I received a letter telling of his death. So ends the first chapter.

"You have seen what you have seen here this morning.

Now, what will be my crafty uncle's next move? I am not ready for it yet. I must make the findings—this first well—a mystery until I lease the land on Nubbin Ridge, the only contiguous field round about that could disturb me. Then I'll try for another well."

The color of his face was ashen. He raised his hand above them. His voice was husky as he said: "I swear you under the hatchet that you will not reveal what you have seen here this morning. You will help me guard the well. I have guns, if necessary, to ward off intruders. Your price, to be fixed by yourselves. Cad goes on guard now but I must increase the guards."

He handed Riley a bunch of letters. "Deliver these in Petrolia as soon as you can go home and get to Petrolia with your car. The letters will bring us help. Bring Ted back with you. The other guards may or may not come with you. Milt, you can come and go at will but remember, *I bank on you.*"

He had finished.

"I'm with ye till the stars melt!" cried Milton, smacking his fists to seal his fidelity. "I can draw a bead along a gun barrel as fine as I ever could."

Cad emptied his pocket-book into Riley's hands, the money to go for provisions. Riley spoke not a word as he grasped the money; the bull-dog expression of his face showed a determination too deep for words. He left on a run and was soon lost from view in the woods. Cad took from the house of mystery, a Winchester, then selected a commanding position on the hillside where he could scan the territory around the well for some distance. Jim, weary and hungry from a long period of work and vigilance, started for the cabin, a gun over his shoulder. Milt loitered around the well for some time, then skulked into the bushes below, as he supposed a traitor to the cause of Jim Snowdon, but, in truth, a friend.

When old Milt slowly brought up at last by the zigzag fence at the top of the hill back of his clearing, he turned and his eyes swept the Barrens with a greedy triumph. All his married life he had carried a galling load of debt. Now, an opportunity loomed up over the horizon wherein he

might throw off the heavy burden and then sit down and smoke his pipe in sweet content through the westering days yet left to him. Was he to deliver Jim into the hands of the Philistines to do it? Very decidedly his conscience answered back in the negative, since Jim had made clear the purely technical claims held by the Petrolia clique. True, he had rallied to Jim's ensign for the coming fray, but now he beheld it as a matter of fifty-fifty with Jim, whichever way the opposition chose to take.

"Can't see how it can hurt Jim if I pull old John's purse-strings for a little," was his final decision as he climbed over the fence and made straight for the house.

At the door, Aunt Ibbey met him with a haughty toss and a distant bend. "Ye're nothin' but a gallavantin' old traitor to everybody agoin' round. Only I had the cow 'n' that five dollars that I had when I married ye, I wouldn't be settin' here under a mortgage long with ye, ye sly, sneakin' old fox. Now I wonder what trick we'll hear of next bein' cut. 'Tain't so much devilment ye carry on, as 'tis mean little low-down tricks. An' people that ain't tetch'd by it, laugh at the ones that git it. Some day ye'll over-reach an' land in jail where ye b'long. Me here chlorin' and hoein' garden an' ye prowlin' around all night!"

Unmindful of vituperation old Milt met her with that same old raccoon smile of his. Silently, he passed her and crossed the floor to the table whereon lay an old newspaper. This he spread, then emptied a bagging coat pocket of oil-sand upon it. His eyes gloated. It was even richer looking than he had dared to hope at the well.

"Come here, old gal," he cried in feverish excitement. "Ye'll quit yer snarlin' 'n' squallin' when ye see this, providin' ye've the brains of a wood-pecker to know what it means. Ye'll do a Highlan' fling that would petrify all the hoochy-coochy dancers goin'. See here!" She came cautiously to his side, and for good reason, for it was always during ruptures of domestic affairs that he would exploit his wildest tales.

"Jim Snowdon has found oil!" he boomed.

She stooped and smelled the sand. "Does have an oil scent," she conceded with a ray of hope.

“It’s the pure quill. I’ll dance around here to-day; then tomorrer I’ll go down to Petrolia and bring ye home a mortgage for a present ’nless old John Snowdon proves himself a rascal agin.”

## XXII

### “WATCHFUL WAITING”

The western sun was nearing the skyline and the hill-tops of the Barrens were bathed with a mellow glow by the last departing rays.

Along the road that wound up the hill to Hermit Spring, a car freighted to its capacity labored in the climb. At times it buzzed, then “chugged” and threatened to halt; but Riley Henshaw at the wheel maneuvered to keep it running. Seated beside the resolute driver was Ted Atwater, the runaway, with beaming face and heart pounding with joy. But what to say and how to act in the presence of Snowdon and Allen when he met them, troubled him more and more as he nearer drew to his destination. He knew he was on the list of forgiven but he dreaded that scorching tongue of Cad’s!

In the rear seat sat two stalwart men, powerful in appearance. The western style of hat, tipped rakishly back, further attested an air of nonchalance and bravado. But when the car rose from the lower reaches where the purple shadows were verging into darkness, up to the place where the sunlight yet fell around them, they did not look like plainmen. The fine texture of their clothing indicated opulence. Who were they? They had as quickly sprung to view as the fearless Highlanders from every clump of heather on the wild moors of Scotland sprang to the call of Roderick Dhu.

As they were passing through a vast expanse of wild bush-honeysuckles, in a perfume that intoxicated, a mother doe with twin fawns bounded across the road in full view, just ahead! The young deer, with their inherent instinct of fear at the presence of man, kept close to the frightened mother in wild graceful leaps.

“Stop!” cried the more brawny of the strangers.

Riley quickly brought the car to a halt. The strangers

leaped out as if to follow the deer, their eyes longing for another glimpse.

“Ye gods! Why does Jim Snowdon mull over the half-million paid for these Barrens? This old despised place of earth is worth it! To live and breathe the fragrance of these hills and see such sights as this, I’d give the city of New York were it within my grasp!”

“Guess Jim had rather have the money an’ buy a bottle of perfume, occasionally, an’ promenade down to the zoo an’ see a deer,” piped up Ted.

The nature-lover, unmindful of the retort, stood listening to the bird medley of farewell canticles to the day. From near and far, from everywhere, it poured till woodland and sky seemed filled with song.”

“Warbles at eve,” lent his companion, equally enchanted. “’Tis the lilt of the wood poets!”

“In these hills I spend my summer, Snowdon permitting,” declared the first. “Drive on, Mr. Hen—ah. We’ll lighten the load and walk the remaining distance and drink of the beauties of nature by the way.”

“Wonder what ails them fellers’ heads?” said Riley to Ted, skeptically, after they were well out of hearing of the pair. “Wonder if they would gush at the squawk of every goose or at the hoot of the owl? City guys togged up like cowpunchers, eh? Husky lookin’ pair. But I b’lieve they’s a reason for ’em here besides helpin’ guard the well. They’d been in Petrolia a week, lookin’ up records and the like but waitin’ Jim’s call, I gathered from bits of their talk over my shoulder, comin’. Jim’s long-headed. He’s got a use for ’em. But I can’t figger why he unloaded his secrets to old Milt Cobb this mornin’. Bet old Milt don’t stop to eat or drink till he gits to Petrolia to disgorge himself. But surely Jim can read ’im by this time. So if he spews anything damagin’ to business, w’y Jim’s to blame, that’s all.”

When they reached the derrick, they found Jim and Cad waiting their coming. Riley gave an account of his dilatory passengers who were soon to follow.

With a smile, which Ted interpreted to mean that all was well with him, Jim squeezed his hand in welcome and got

into the car. But Cadmus feigned not to see him, while struggling with a smile that would not keep back as he took a seat beside Jim.

“Oh, yes, I musn’t forgit to tell you about the robbery last night, Jim!” exclaimed Riley, highly animated, when they had stopped near the cabin and were unloading bundles of catables. “All Nubbin Ridge was worked up to a high pitch this mornin’ over it when I left. Hayhows missed a big ham out of their smoke-house and Jerushy lost two big loaves of bread that was took from the out-door bake-oven durin’ the night.” And Riley gave Jim a wink bespeaking knowledge.

“Great guns! and to think, Riley, we’ve a lot of the meat left in the cabin yet.” Jim could have been knocked down by a feather.

The thought of the petty crime quite staggered Snowdon for the moment. Not so Cadmus. He seized an ax for which he had come and went galloping back down the road to the well, his laughter reverberating in the hills at the thought of honest Jim eating stolen ham. Jim tried to collect his thoughts. The theft of bread could easily be mended. But the Hayhow part of it! Hannibal was already an enemy and lined up with their adversaries against them.

“A big steal, something worth while, is never regarded in the same light as a trivial theft,” he reasoned. “On a grand scale, the perpetrator is admired for his daring and sagacity. Let him steal a pin’s worth and even thieves hold for him the most scurvy contempt. While I didn’t pilfer, directly, yet I partook of the rapine.”

“Not, perhaps, as knowingly as I did,” laughed Riley, who was inclined to regard the matter as a huge joke and not beyond complete reparation. “For I knew the old boy never has ham of his own at this time of year and little to buy with. But I was too hungry to stop and consider and I guess it was the same pinch with you, Jim.”

“Of course I can settle for the bread,—but the meat and the story that goes abroad! If I go to them and confess and settle—offer your story for evidence of my innocence—how does it place old Milt? Yet the evidence against him



would be purely circumstantial and would hardly convict him if the parties should bring him to trial. The slippery old eel!”

And he, too, could not refrain from laughing.

Riley looked for Ted. Since his arrival, Ted had been too busily engaged in romping about with the dog to have heard anything they said. “Well, for the present, it is safe with us three. Old Milt will never let it out, though everybody on the Ridge will suspect him. But not us. A way may open to settle for it later.”

“Then, agreed we do not say anything for the present. It is a bad time for me to make any overtures to the Hayhows. But I will find some way to compensate Jerushy.”

“Nixie on Jerushy. That’s settled. My talk helped to drive the old fox forth and I will shoulder my part,” laughed Riley. With that he jumped into the car. “Be over tomorrow night,” he sang out, cheerily, as he rolled away.

“Here is a letter from Jean,” Ted said rather shyly as he ran up to help carry in the baggage belonging to the strangers. He could not yet feel his premises sound though there had been assurances. How was he ever to look his friends squarely in the face again? Never, he believed. Not, at least, till he proved his worth and loyalty. He had planned to become their abject slave on his return. No toil, no slings of the tongue would be too hard for him to bear, only to be near them. And now he was back. Jim noticed his lips quivering when he drew out the letter.

“Never you mind, Buddie,” he said kindly. “Never did a calamity happen but what something good came of it. We will wait and see how ends the colossal joke that you put over on us.”

He could not wait to be alone while he read the letter. His fingers visibly trembled as he opened the seal.

“Petrolia, May —, 19—.

“My best and dearest Friend:

“I have time to pen in return, only a very brief note as the bearer of this letter seems in great haste.

“Mr. Henshaw has told me that you have found oil. Congratulations unbounded. But it may also bring you trouble. And forgive me, Jim, but I drew from small things Ted unintentionally dropped, that your resources may be—well, a trifle low owing to unexpected expenses. Yes, it takes a woman to pry. Forgive me. Now unless your memory is very short, you may recall the help you so unstintedly rendered me when I was needy. You cast your bread upon the waters and now you find a few crumbs of it after many days. There, stop, or I will place my hand over your mouth. I enclose a check for five hundred dollars. Please, Jim, just use it. I can let you have more and would be so happy to do something for you.

“Yours,

“Jean.”

At the close Snowdon averted his face to hide his emotion from Ted. He was a staunch believer in the doctrine that whatever is done brings whatever is best in the end, the doctrine that he had just proclaimed in other words to the boy but he had not anticipated such quick fruition; not dreamed that a benevolent gift bestowed in more prosperous days, would be cast up again by the waves at his feet in time of need. By it he was quite overcome. Ted was narrowly watching his demeanor.

“Mr. Jim,” he ventured in trembling voice, “have I been the cause of more trouble?”

Jim did not turn his face but answered, his voice low and husky, “No, Ted. But I fear you have been the cause of bringing me luck that I refrain from”—he did not finish. “You were guiding an angel’s steps.”

Ted loved to think of that. In Jim’s regard, he now believed he had won a state of complete restitution. Then he began to hustle luggage into the cabin and never did a boy buckle harder to a task. He walked on air. He whistled bird-songs—a happy boy once again. If there is such a thing as a look of mingled sadness and happiness, then Jim’s face wore it. It came from reluctance to accept financial aid from Jean and from joy in the beauty of heart which inspired it. He felt much like himself again and had things shipshape in the cabin and supper

well under way when the strangers came up in the twilight, raving over Big Ben and the spring, the pond, and the romantic log cabin where they would love to dwell forever. James extended to them a royal welcome, such as only barons can give, calling them, familiarly, by their given names, Homer and Virgil. In the living room they were further enchanted with the unique comforts: the wide window permitting a broad view of the wilds outside; the old-fashioned fireplace and the crane; the electric lights and the artistic fixtures! They openly declared that Jim, by rights, should have paid a million for the Barrens. Jim winced at the allusion; it was ever a tender spot.

In the absence of servants, he left them and returned to the kitchen to prepare refreshments. Very naturally, out of boy and dog curiosity, Ted and the dog stole in where they were, and no less naturally Homer and Virgil were petting them while Jim was frying stolen ham, his conscience no less seared than the meat which was sending up a relishing but condemning odor unto high heaven, when the dog, having formed an aversion to the company, maliciously bit Virgil, the younger of the pair, in the calf of the leg. That caused great commotion in the cabin of course. The wound had first to be cauterized, then the dog chastized. James swiftly made a very thorough job of both, more especially the training of the canine as judged from the howls that rent the air. Ted bitterly and silently resented the treatment of Lark and strove to allay his pain by caresses, the while blinking tears. Afterward, however, he very solemnly admitted to Cad that it was very hard on the stranger yet he held it to be the very making of the pup.

Homer and Virgil came to the table with ravenous appetites, the best of sauces. That ham! Never had they eaten anything equal unto it before. Mr. Snowdon suffered helplessly while they questioned him as to where he got it; how it was cured, what was the age of the animal and divers questions which drew perilously close to the actual circumstances. He prevaricated very skilfully for a green practitioner and breathed a silent and thankful amen when they dropped the subject of Hayhows' ham.

But they switched right to Jerushy's incomparable bread! James was strictly a vegetarian for the remainder of that meal, unable to compromise with his conscience sufficiently to dine on pork or even wheat.

That night, James and Homer were to keep the watch at the well. Already there had been signs of incursion as reported by Cad. Late that afternoon Hannibal Hayhow had appeared, coming down from the hill above, and crossed the road near the forbidden field. Cad, alert for predatory inroads, had detected a stealthy walk through the growth and quietly proceeded in that direction with gun ready for action in case the intruder wilfully persisted in passing the line of posted notices which thickly surrounded the well. Hannibal was visibly surprised and disconcerted when Cadmus, in battle array, suddenly appeared around the thick clump of bushes which Hayhow had evidently chosen for a vantage-shield behind which to carry on his work of espionage. Though Cadmus sang out a cheery greeting, Hannibal did not fail to notice the look of steel in his determined eye. Cadmus was a true child of Oklahoma oildom and Snowdon knew well his qualities when he brought him east. He was dependable, and on him, Snowdon unreservedly depended. Hayhow returned the salute in a hang-dog way and sprang for his gun which stood by a rock a short distance back of him. Cad warned him not to touch it; and when he heard a gun-hammer click, he evidently considered it healthier for him not to attempt it at the moment.

"Great note, when a feller can't come through here huntin' cattle anymore 'thout havin' a gun pulled on 'im," he said while he looked a malicious hatred he dared not utter.

To that Allen laughingly replied that he seemed more interested in wells than stray cattle and warned him to be off while the going was good or perchance his Petrolia friends might have to come out after him with a box. At that, Hayhow ventured to reach for his gun again, but Allen coolly forbade, informing him the gun would be sent to him later by Riley Henshaw without fail.

"Will see you later," growled the disgruntled Hannibal

and with that he hurried away, convinced that there had been rich findings.

Cadmus consigned the contraband taken from the enemy to the house of mystery. So rested matters when Snowdon, who had been at the cabin most of the day with Homer relieved Allen for the night.

The ground around the well had been cleared and cleaned of everything combustible for a wide space, in the event that forest fires broke out, save for one huge old pine log which reached almost from the foot of the derrick to the edge of the bushes. The purpose for leaving the log was known only to Jim and Cad. The oil-pots, which hung in the derrick and on the engine-house had been so arranged that when lit, the old log would cast a deep shadow, on the upper side, its entire length in the surrounding illumination. In this deep shadow, on some dark night, Jim Snowdon anticipated that either he or Cad, for they were to take alternate turns at watch, was likely to take cognizance of some scout, either from the enemy's camp or in the interest of some oil company, crawling up to get a position under the derrick floor, there to lay secreted and gain any possible knowledge of findings. Such was his surmise from having passed through the phases of prospecting in other fields. He was aware that in the early days of the industry, a portion of the Barrens had been tested by the crude process of the times and condemned. That was history handed down from first inhabitants. Frequently, such territory, developed by later experience and methods, had proven productive. His venture was sure to attract the interest of prospectors, especially if the result was kept a mystery. If the news of a rich find was circulated—and such news travels like wild-fire—then the race would be on to secure contiguous holdings. But tangible proof of a pay-streak would be necessary to start an excitement. Certain it was that old Milt had gone forth with a high oil fever, and Hannibal Hayhow now had ample grounds for strong suspicion. Any story they might concoct would be the proper incentive to lure the adventurer to attempt a close scrutiny. Not infrequently had spectators, manifesting interest, paid them visits while they were drilling; and now the old log might be remem-

bered by some one, perhaps, as a means to afford a way to pass the guards in the darkness.

The covert in which the watcher lay concealed was fashioned out of poles; over it was heaped dead brush to represent a brush-pile carelessly thrown together on the edge of thick standing bushes now in full foliage. The brush covering could be raised in front when occupied, and deftly lowered when the occupant was absent, to hide all trace of the site. The interior permitted the tenant to sit or recline, at his will. The first layer of the canopy was made of strips of dry bark, arranged to shed rain. And therein reposed Jim on a thick bed of leaves, wound in a warm blanket, as snug as a bug in a rug, his trusty Winchester beside him. To keep awake in such case was the only difficulty. Occasionally he scanned the shadow through a pair of strong binoculars but his vigilance was not rewarded that night and time waxed heavy. When after long waiting he craned his neck out of the shelter to behold Aurora, the most roseate goddess of the myths, flushing the eastern sky, great was his relief.

When it was light enough to travel, he crept out and dropped the wicket after him. His duty was to pay Homer a call on the opposite side of the camp where he was ensconced in a shelter very similar to his own. He chose a circuitous route through the bushes to avoid the open, lest he become a target for a bullet from the treacherous Hayhow who might be lurking in the undergrowth, still smarting from his recent encounter. As Snowdon cautiously crossed through the bushes the dawning got in his blood and his cares took wings. It was a glorious sunrise when viewed from the hills. The impulse to stop and feast his eyes upon what was new around him—for he had been walking blindly since the winter—was irresistible. Trillium, its nodding blooms white as lightly fallen snow, rioted everywhere; bush-honeysuckles shook out their deep pink bells invitingly to the humming-bird; here and there a dogwood tree displayed its creamy blossoms, telling, according to Indian tradition, that it was time to plant corn; dog-roses blushed their deepest; along the brooks the alders were shaking powdery curls; and from all the tangle poured clamorous songs of feathered revelry.

From far off on the hillside, came the bark of a fox calling to her whelps. It was a morning to reanimate the most carking soul and turn it blithe.

The man had been standing for some time, his face a study, while he inhaled deep breaths of the flower-scented air. “If the prisoner of Chillon learned to love his prison cell, in how much greater measure have I come to love these old rock-ribbed hills. They would make a poet of me—if I weren’t born to be a ‘Baron’.”

While he had been hailing the sunrise another scene beyond the hills might have been more highly interesting to him could he have been aloft and looking down. It was Milton Cobb, wearing that same old raccoon smile, up long before the sun, and riding into Petrolia at a brisk trot behind his old mare, Nance. As he gave her a cut with a beech gad which caused her to throw up her tail and increase the jog, he ruminated, “In this game o’ cut-throat, it was old John Snowdon that shuffled the pack and turned up a club. Jim has ordered it up. I’ll swing a trump, accordin’ to Hoyle, an’ fetch out their biggest. They’ll play a hot game, but I’m Jim’s partner, hopin’ we eucher the old trout. Git-ap, Nance!”—and he brought her another cut on the flank in his hurry—“for I hold the ace. I’ll bring in the first trick. Jim’s sure got some good cards up his sleeve. If he hadn’t, he wouldn’t have sot down to the table with the old scoundrel. But it’ll make old John squirm an’ twist some any way when I rake the board.”

The thought of abasing the mighty, turned the old raccoon smile into a wily chuckle. And James would have approved of the lead.

## XXIII

NANCY DAWSON

Though the office of Snowdon and Son was open early to the public that morning on which Milton descended upon Petrolia, the inner sanctuary was closed to him, wherein the object of his journey was closeted with several magnates of high finance who were there on an important mission. So he was duly informed by the page; and further informed that he must not disturb the meeting when he attempted to open the door, unbidden, upon the conclave.

"When's the Great Wang-a-Wang of the Most High Wack-a-Whacks likely to be free to talk business with me?" he inquired irascibly.

"Possibly not until this afternoon," mildly answered the page, pussy-footing up.

Here old Milt broke the rules, opened the door, and walked into his Majesty's presence, unannounced.

"Where is that block-head of a page?" roared old John at the sight of Milt, annoyed by his uncouth presence at that particular time. "Milt, you must get right out of here and wait till I am through with this business I have on hand. Hear me, Milt?" as Milt proceeded to the end of the table around which sat a distinguished looking body, which might, in truth, have been taken for the president's cabinet in council. Mr. Snowdon rose in great flurry—not to say ire—and shook his hand toward the door. But he failed to put Milton out of countenance though the old man was beginning to feel small in the presence of such high-browed potency and rather regretted his step when they all simultaneously turned in revolving chairs, threw back their heads and lifted various styles of glasses through which to view him, much as if he were a moon-calf.

"Go on with yer rat-killin', John, and I'll jest make myself right to home here, in this big chair till it's over if ye'll jest lend me a spittoon." And the insistent Milton sank down heavily like a sack of chop into a great deep-



seated chair. Flashes of gold and diamonds further increased his awe; but great was his relief when satisfied with one glance at him the "high-ups" swung back into former position and began to trace lines on a map spread before them on the table.

"Yes, we can run this road up Hazel Fork, get a low grade as far as the Echo Hills"—it was one of the strangers speaking while Snowdon roared out to Milt again to be off as he took a step toward him—"then tunnel that hill and come out into Sunrise Valley, low grade all the way," the voice went on, unmindful of any interruptions.

"Well, take that route if it suits you?" thundered Snowden in a vein of defiance not understood by his associates. Old Milt caught the meaning quickly, though the words were well camouflaged.

By this time, he was on his feet in possession of a scrap of valuable information for Jim, verifying the old adage, "A dog that brings a bone will carry one."

"Here is sand from the Hermit Spring gusher," he coolly said, depositing a package on the table. "I will wait outside now till ye git through railroadin', Gov'nor Snowdon."

Then he blew out through the door like a snow-squall and seated himself there to await his hour. At length the door of the sanctum sanctorum suddenly opened and the high officials of the trunk railway pompously filed out. As they were passing old Milt on their way to the outer door, donning their silk hats as they hurried, he turned up his head and sociably began, "If ye run yer road up Hazel Fork, it'll pass my place jest down over the hill back of the cow-barn. Call some day when ye're goin' by an' we'll tap an ink bottle and open a keg o' spikes."

They had not quite vanished yet from sight when one of their party who had lingered to have a parting fling with old John—a very short man he was—came racing out after them. "Hey, there!" called Milt to those in advance. "Ye've broke loose from the caboose! Down brakes and couple up!"

It might be in order, now, to disclose their business with the head of Snowdon and Son before old Milt is called into the secret den for an interview and a grill.

A trunk railway line ran through Petrolia. The cor-

poration that owned it had recently purchased another important line which touched at a point sixty miles north of the city. To connect these lines was to enhance business. And the distance and contour of a very hilly country taken into consideration, favored Petrolia and Whittles Depot to the north as the logical termini of the proposed route. Already a road connected these points, a one-horse affair, and chief among the stockholders and president of the combine was John Snowdon, Sr. Other companies, to get freight transported over this road, had long been bled; and the belief had grown strong among railway officials that old John Snowdon was the sagamore in the blood-letting. Since the greater lines had been consolidated, naturally the obnoxious president of the "Little Cut-throat" track, long under surveillance, now found himself pinched in a vise, because of a merger which threatened a financial collapse of the House of Snowdon. Sell his road at their own figures or they would construct a parallel line to crush it, was the irrevocable mandate of the victors. So, in a last desperate move, suffering the sting of humiliation, the deepest he had ever felt, Snowdon had called the merciless powers of the trunk line to conference with small hopes of extricating himself from their squeezers. But the last chance in battle despises not a paper shield. And when old Milt that morning had bull-headed his way into the toils which John Snowdon had long been preparing for himself, he had found the old war-horse, with back to the wall.

As previously intimated, old Milt had not been slow to note how quickly Snowdon's manner changed when he gleaned it was the fixed purpose of his adversaries, if they failed to corner him, to pierce the Barrens with their proposed road. His answer had been equivalent to a dictum that his company would not consider their nominal price, but labor, rather, to break the clinch of the mailed fist. And why this change of attitude? If James had found oil he would redeem the Barrens, and perpetually harass the move. There was left a fighting chance. He courted fighting chances. It was the blood of the Bruces.

"Next," called the magnate through the door to old Milt after the "caboose" had pulled out.

"I've an idee it's to be a close shave," responded Milt as he hustled back into the room and took a seat. "I notice yer razor hain't wore off any of its keen edge though I've an idee it'll be gittin' some blunt afore ye git over the whiskers of all that 'Grand Trunk Company'."

Old John had his back turned toward him and was examining the sand. He had opened the package before Milt returned. Under the arc of electric lights which flooded the room, he was enabled to see perfectly well the quality of the sand and oil. Presently, he turned in his chair and with knit brows began the study of Milt's face for an uncomfortable length of time. John Snowdon's reputation as a business sharper had been built on his keen study of the faces of those with whom he dealt, together with a personality that electrified. His power over those with whom he came in contact was little short of mesmerism. But the face of the prominent citizen from Nubbin Ridge, bore the scrutiny well, wearing that same raccoon smile.

Snowdon suddenly turned in his chair, rested his elbows on the arms and clasped his hands. "To whom are you playing false—James or me?"

Old Milt smarted under the lash. His voice was raucous as he replied: "Sand is sand, John. I've brought what ye asked for—third sand, oil sand. Many feet of it full of oil. A bargain's a bargain. Now fulfill yer part."

"There was no bargain, Milt. You refused to enter into one. I didn't expect you,"—coolly.

Milton's high aspirations had received an unexpected jolt. The raccoon smile gave way to a crafty leer. Like a cobra he stuck out his head and hissed, "Books that'll show what ye paid for the Barrens may take the wind out of yer sails."

Old John swayed for a moment like a reed shaken by the wind. His face paled. Old Milt's words had knifed him in a vital spot. Great heaven! had Jim Snowdon gained access to the books of the Newark Oil Company though the corporation had been defunct for a year and the last constituent had recently passed away? True, the purchase price mentioned in the deed for transfer of the Barrens was a nominal dollar (very common in law) but how much

more had the grantors received? The books recorded it but John Snowdon had had the assurance that the books would never be opened. Yet Jim Snowdon had found a leak. Then, there were the letters sent to the brother in Scotland—receipts given for half a million dollars with which to make the purchase. Now the books, if subpoenaed, would divulge that he, John Snowdon, acting with the power of attorney had been guilty of a penal offense! All this arose before him like a horrible nightmare. The harrowing thought of it had never reproached him before this day. The skeleton in the closet was beginning to rattle. He looked down at the grinning Milt, crowded into the chair before him, enjoying his wretched plight. He started for him in his desperation.

“Now quit, John!” exclaimed old Milt, springing up and jumping back, for he saw danger to his personal safety in the man’s eye. “Quit right where ye are! Now listen, John! ‘Tain’t half so bad mebbly as ye think!” and he had got the table between them. “Tetch me an’ ye’ll be wearin’ beefsteak over both yer eyes! I didn’t come here to hurt ye but I will if——” they were both dodging around the table. “Ye wouldn’t listen to reason an’ I only said that to bring ye off yer perch. I don’t know what any books say; an’ ye know Jim Snowdon wouldn’t tell me anything he knows; he’s that tongue-tied.”

Old Milt’s words gave room for speculation and Snowdon paused. He felt what Milt had said was true; his nephew came of a stock that disclosed no secrets, or purposes until they struck. Jim would never scatter abroad any such intelligence. He would deal a crushing blow without warning. But whether the charge that old Milt had let fall was only conjecture, or whether a report was current, puzzled him. At any rate it would be to his advantage to secure any news from the Barrens, truth or otherwise, of which old Milt might have possession.

“Sit down, Milt. Then tell me all about where you got this oil-sand and how you doctored it, if you wish me to surrender the mortgage,” he commanded in mollified tones.

“Ye’ll keep the other side of the table from me,” declared old Milt as he came up on the opposite side. “I’ve allus heard ye was as quick-tempered as the devil but I didn’t

s'pose it was bad as what it is. I didn't have time to git mad nuff to fight. Ye set down, then I will. Then if ye go off half-cocked agin, I'll have time to square for the charge. I ain't afeared of ye, John, in a fair bout an' ye can jest salt that down as a fact."

Snowdon ignored old Milt's excitement.

"You say that Jim has struck oil, third sand oil, and you bring sand from the same," he snapped, as he eyed Milt through his prodigious shell-rimmed spectacles.

"I do," averred Milton with the dignity of a court witness.

"How deep is that sand?"

"I don't know."

"Didn't hear Jim say?"

"No."

"Hear him say whether he thought he had found oil in paying quantity or not?"

"No."

"Is he pumping oil into a receiving tank and having the pipe line company lay a line up there?"

"No. He stopped as soon as he struck it and put a heavy guard around the well. It's a mystery."

"Why?"

"Wants to lease Nubbin Ridge afore the news of the find gits out. Nubbin Ridge is the only territory near."

"I don't think it's much of a mystery with you in the secret. Who are the guards?"

"Wal, themselves, Riley Henshaw, an' me, an' two strange fellers that I don't know."

"And one of the guards is down here today trying to sell out!" and Snowdon laughed despite the dark clouds rising above his horizon.

"I'll tell ye how 'tis, John," said old Milt, uneasily, as he shifted his quid. "I don't see any use of him trying to keep it a secret. Ye've got the strangle holt on him and if ye want to reach out at any time an' claw him in 'ye can do it."

"Yes, by paying dearly for it," was the almost despondent answer. Then he added, "Now, he stands there guarding what? I don't understand?"

"No, he ain't standin'. He's tryin' to lease Nubbin

Ridge afore some other company gobbles it up. Riley Henshaw told me last night that he was goin' over to-day to guard an' Jim was goin' to start leasin'."

Old John's brows knit. To redeem the Barrens would be to relieve himself of all threatening difficulty. On the other hand, if the territory proved worthless, it would place him on the verge of financial ruin. Yet even that would be preferable to prison bars.

"Go home, Milt. I am too busy today to consider your proposition. Come back a week from today. Then it will be a frank yes or no. Get me?" he asked, rising and waving Milton to the door.

"Jest to give ye some more time to perpetrate some more deviltry," foreboded Milt as he seized his hat and made off, while his accusation fell on deaf ears.

An hour later, old Nance trotted leisurely up Maple Avenue, homeward bound. It was a wide, shady way, bordered by beautiful homes with spacious lawns. No business traffic ever disturbed this aristocratic quarter; even the birds whose habitat was in this favored retreat looked down with indifference upon feathered itinerants that chanced in. Exclusiveness was manifested, too, in the very deportment of the fine-haired canines with locked and lettered brass collars, who gathered in packs with social noses to sniff at any common cur bent on excursion. The milkman, the ice-man, the grocer must make their deliveries in the morning before the guild in millionaire street was astir. If a countryman tried the doors on Maple Avenue with his produce, he never tried again, for he was sure to go away frozen, even by the servants.

When old Nance was once turned into this quiet lane she ceased acting skittish, ceased shying at the sight of cars, and at the sound of horn and clatter; and that was why old Milt had chosen it. Then, too, by taking this circuitous route out of Petrolia, he would not meet with any of his associates, who never polluted Maple Avenue with their common presence. His head hung down, he was just wondering what manner of story he could concoct to avoid blasting Aunt Ibbey's hopes entirely, what he should offer instead of the mortgage for her to burn, when, suddenly, up behind him came trotting a pacer of the

race turf, driven by the nattiest of jockeys. As the sharp hoof clips on the pavement came nearer, Milt turned his head to look behind. He observed that the steed bearing down on him was "King Canute" of enviable record. Trim of limb as the mountain deer, his head high in the air with nostrils dilated, the horse appeared to be touching terra firma with his hind feet only, the fores striking high, apparently climbing in their supple use. Before old Milt could turn, King Canute was abreast. The jockey was guiding him as closely to Milt's rig as possible without causing a mixture of wheels.

Old Nance awoke! Terrorized at the unusual sound and onrush she gave such a terrific spring that horse and harness threatened to separate. At the same time Milt parted company with his can of oil, which flew out behind the old buggy, likewise his hat, and the race was on. In her palmy days, old Nance had the reputation in the hills of taking no horse's dust. But her years, coupled with starvation, had long ago placed her in a somnambulant state from which she was only revived when belabored with a switch. Today she had shown unmistakable signs of rejuvenescence and when King Canute struck a challenge at her side, she suddenly raised her gaunt frame and accepted it. No arching of the neck,—her head shot straight out with ears laid back. King Canute's head was now at her flanks, old Milt cursing but holding the lines firmly, the jockey yelling with laughter at the spectacle. King Canute gained, his head moving up inch by inch on old Nance as she limbered for the race. They were flying! Children screamed! Dogs raced after, barking! Maple Avenue ceased to be exclusive! King Canute's head had reached up even with Nance's. Old Milt saw she was holding her own. He reached forward and struck her with the whip. She responded and gave new signs of impetus. Slowly but surely she was leaving King Canute! The jockey had ceased laughing and was nervously applying the whip. King Canute was steadily losing! Milton now observed an automobile closely following behind. Going to be arrested for speeding he thought. What cared he? Old Nance was winning the race. Suddenly some one in the car shouted, "Halt!"

Milt reined down on old Nance. Gradually she slowed and came to a stop. The race was won!

The car drew up beside Milt and from the rear seat, a man jumped down. He was well-dressed, a slouch hat shading his eyes—evidently a plainclothes man to make the arrest. He straightway walked up and critically surveyed old Nance. Her head was hanging low, her limbs in a tremor and steaming. Then he turned and looked at old Milt, quizzically, for a time.

“Wal, come serve yer papers an’ have it over,” said Milt impatiently. “I was chased into this scrape but I’m willin’ to lay in jail to have the honor o’ beatin’ King Canute. If ye’ve got anything that is really fast in Petrolia, w’y jest trot it out.”

“I’m not here to arrest you,” said the stranger, turning his attention again to old Nance and stroking her head and neck. “I’m the owner of King Canute.”

“Be, hey!”—nonchalantly feeling his pockets for tobacco and pipe. “If I was the owner, I’d sell ’im or swap ’im an’ git somethin’ that had a little life in it. Drivin’ snails is all right. But drivin’ a horse at a snail’s pace is entirely out o’ place,”—scratching a match and starting his pipe.

“How old is this old bone-heap?” asked the man, unheeding his remark.

“She’s a sucker. Jest took ’er off ’n the old mare long enuff to drive to Petrolia. Git ap! ye see, I must be gittin’ home to let her nurse.”

“Hold on a minute, Uncle.” The man looked in her mouth. She’s no doubt one of the pair that Noah had in the Ark. What’s her name?”

“Nancy Dawson, the Queen o’ the Turf,” Milt glibly invented. “Nance for common. Git ap!”

“Wait, Uncle. Want to sell her?”

“Hain’t perticler to part with her.”

The turf king kept looking her over. The sight was almost grewsome. Yet possibly she might be revived to do one more heat before she died. “Well, what is your price for her?”

“One thousand dollars spot cash. And nothin’ short o’ that takes Nancy Dawson. Ye see it does me a heap o’



good to come up behind some o' yer brag steppers an' pass when I come to town. Ye see I never enter the races with her out o' respect o' yer feelin's here in Petrolia. Don't want to see ye fellers round steppin' on yer upper lips after it's over."

The man laughed at the fabulous price. "Oh, come off, now, Uncle. What will you take and be quick about it?"

"Nance hain't no cheap skate to be barterin' on in gypsy fashion. Git ap!"

"Stop. I'll give you one hundred."

"Git ap!"

"Whoa, Nance. Take two hundred?"

"Git ap!"

"Three?"

"Git ap!"

The man took her by the bit to keep her from starting.

"Four?"

"Le' go that bit. Git ap, Nance."

"Five?"

"If ye don't le' go that bit, I'll strike ye right over the head," said old Milt, rising and flourishing his beech gad. "With some rich guy ye wouldn't turn a word at two thousand; no, nor five. Nancy jests suits me. Git ap, Nance, an' take me home at a mile a minute."

The man let go of her bit and stepped back. "Well, you old fool, turn around and follow me back to my barn and I'll give you your price."

Milton was seized with paroxysms of joy though he hid all signs of it. Seemingly regretful he turned faithful old Nancy about. A cool, clear thousand! Then he was seized with a fear that old Nance might not live to meet the delivery for she clumsily ambled along with drooping head; the relaxation from the high tension of muscle was beginning to tell. But she was spared to fulfill the contract and when Milt drove her into the elaborate stables of the turfman, as directed, Nancy Dawson truly entered into the highest state of horse heaven. Money had not been spared in equipment. The barn was already filled with a laughing crowd of spectators who applauded Milt as he rode in, hatless and smiling. They pronounced it

the event of the season. King Canute had been badly beaten by an old worn-out farm horse.

“Good-bye, Nancy,” said old Milt with shaky voice as he took leave of his old friend. Two grooms were busy administering a sponge bath while she contentedly munched the choicest of fare. “Ibby and me watched ye grow up from a little colt out there on the hills. Faithfully, ye plowed the flinty soil for the corn. Through wind and weather, ye carried me to town and brought me safely home again, times when I’d be rip roarin’ drunk. And now at the end, ye—ye—have saved us from the poor-house!” And the old man was sniveling.

Two weeks from that time, out in their little cabin on the hillside, the intelligence reached Aunt Ibby and Uncle Milt that old Nancy had paid her debt to nature; that she had never rallied from her last race. But she had won for them. And who shall say theirs were insensate tears at the passing of an old and faithful friend?

## XXIV

### WHEREIN A SHADOW PLAYS A CONSPICUOUS PART

Night at Hermit Spring, the fourth since a guard had been placed on picket duty around the well! The news that oil had been found had flashed forth like a meteor due to Milton's habit of flaring secrets, like rockets. And the mystery, linked with Jim's effort to lease Nubbin Ridge, had fomented the country far and wide to a pitch that bordered on frenzy. Numerous prospectors had journeyed thither only to meet with evasive answers at the outposts and turned back little wiser than they came.

It was Jim's vigil of the shadow. In the firm belief that his plan would draw a scout from the enemy's camp at no distant time to investigate, he lay in his wickyup, waiting. He felt somehow that tonight the expected was going to happen; perhaps for the reason that occasionally an unusual sound from out in the thicket had been caught by his ever alert ear. Then, too, old Milt had been conspicuous for absence on the field, which warranted a surmise that he had exploded in the right place and feared detection. The time was approaching midnight. The lights of the oil-jacks shone out from the derrick with great effulgence and filled the place with phantom shadows. Jim settled the binoculars on the deep shadow of the old log, impatient with waiting for the nights were beginning to wax long.

This time his vigil was rewarded. At least, there appeared to be two darker outlines about the lengths of men in the gloom, and his heart began to thump almost audibly with hope. Surely the dark objects were crawling, crawling along up toward the derrick. Seconds seemed like hours! Suspense was almost beyond endurance. Only the snapping of a twig might turn his fortune to naught. Cold beads of sweat stood on his forehead. The scheme could not, must not fail! He better adjusted the strong glasses to his eyes and focused on the few feet of lighted

space between log and derrick. When he had begun to feel it was all an hallucination, a form crawled out into full view, inch by inch, and a face turned so that the light fell upon it—his friend, Fred Pinks, reporter for the *Petrolia Morning Sun*! Pinks writhed quickly into the deep shadow of the derrick floor and was lost to view. Then, inch by inch, a heavier form crept out into the light. When for a moment there came a chance to see the face, the glasses dropped from Jim Snowdon's hand as if he had been struck. "My father's brother!" he gasped, "who creeps to strike in the dark! Can it be that the same blood courses our veins? In Scotland, I was proud of the name Snowdon. In America, I am ashamed to bear it. He has sold his soul! I'll buy it and keep the price within the proud House of Snowdon."

By this time the midnight visitants were well under the derrick floor in a desperate attempt to gain first-hand information, the one for an enviable newspaper scoop, the other for his personal gain. As Jim crawled noiselessly out of his seclusion the thought that deepest concerned him was how long they would remain. Lithe as the crafty red man in times of the pioneer, he stirred neither bush nor bough, following a well-defined path till he was on the cabin-side of the well. Then, as if just naturally coming down from the cabin to go on guard, with heavy step he proceeded to the derrick whistling carelessly, his gun on his shoulder. He then whistled sharply for Virgil for he usually slept at his post. When that worthy came stumbling in, half asleep, James explained in a loud voice, for the benefit of his listeners, that they would fire up and run down the bailer to see if the walls of the hole had caved in. Whistling he went about the work with no explanation as to why he had taken this strange notion in the night. In due time the bailer was run down and brought up. When he opened the valve, splash went the rich fluid over the floor, pouring through the cracks, the fumes nauseating.

"She's a jewel!" affirmed Virgil, perfectly natural, ignorant of the motive and dodging around to keep out of the spray. "Aren't you afraid of fire?"

"Little," returned Jim coolly, leaning the empty bailer

against a derrick leg. Then he sat down. Virgil did likewise.

“And you say the books show that the Barren’s actually cost my uncle but one paltry dollar per acre, Virgil?”

“That is what they will tell if brought into court,” innocently averred the posterity of the last member, deceased, of the extinct Newark Oil Company.

Jim fancied he heard his victim writhing underneath him.

“But how to keep a relative from wearing prison stripes in this deplorable affair is a ticklish proposition,” he said with deliberate effect.

“Is he aware he is resting on the crater rim of a Vesuvius?”

“May be a Vesuvius under us this minute. Can’t tell.” James knew he heard a disturbance now below.

“What was that?” asked Virgil in a suppressed voice.

“Likely a porcupine. Come, let’s walk towards the cabin.” And he rose followed by Virgil who still felt certain that he had heard a strange noise under the derrick and begged to investigate, for he was far from a coward. James paid no attention. Things were shaping too well to give utterance.

When they had walked a short distance up the path, Snowdon felt that by this time his birds had flown. He raised his gun and fired three parting salutes to a fleeing Philistine whose wretched mind was now filled with thoughts of a vengeful Nemesis.

Lowering his gun, yet smoking, he confessed, “To be truthful, Virgil, we had visitors—the right visitor. You heard him squirming. My uncle was under the derrick but has gone well oiled. Now we may expect something.”

Virgil’s eyes stood open as wide as barn-doors. “Christopher Columbo!” he excitedly roared. “Why didn’t you let me in on it? How do you know he was there?”

“Saw him, and another friend, creep up in the shadow of the old log. Didn’t dare tell you. Wanted you to be a good actor. And you were. Perfectly natural, you know, till they were gone.”

“Well, I’ll be ——. You’re a fox! The devil will never outwit you! Bet if you had touched a match to the old

man's oil-skins, the flames wouldn't have burnt him worse than he's burning now."

"Now, Virgil, you go up to the old bach roost, rout out Cad and get him to come down here to finish the watch with me. You roll in and finish your natural rest. It's over."

He had designed to land the wary old trout by the report of an El Derado, filtered out presumably through Milt Cobb or some forbidden inquisitor, which would increase the fever to snap the bait. In case this failed he would confront him with the proof of his perfidy and if he refused to come to account, then try to reach him through the courts. But his uncle's unanticipated visit had the consequence of completely altering the line of strategy. The older man had sprung a surprise!

Now James was confronted by a new hypothesis. Would his uncle immediately close his option on the Barrens? If not, would he hastily dispose of his effects and abscond? Or would he do neither? It left James with his mind, like all Gaul, divided into three parts.

That night the House of Mystery was razed. Fire obliterated the secret it held. Next morning found James in Petrolia with two detectives, shadowing the "hidden hand," Jean MacCrea financing the movement. He took up quarters at a hotel nearest his quarry and there waited the next issue of the *Morning Sun*. When it appeared on the streets early next morning, he procured a copy and sought the seclusion of his room. The headlines on the very first column, in bold type, proclaimed: "DISCOVERY OF OIL ON THE BARRENS." Then followed a graphic account of how a dauntless reporter of that esteemed sheet, by the aid of a shadow, had passed under the nose of an armed guard of crack gunners, had poked his head into the very jaws of the lion, and probed the mystery. There had, in truth, been discovered a new field of oil of a superior grade. James could not repress smiles as he read the incident of the drench and miraculous escape. Great glory awaited the intrepid reporter in the eyes of the paper. Not a whit was said as to the reporter's companion. This might have been so by mutual agreement. Pinks was glad

no doubt that he did not have to share honors; the other equally as glad to escape them.

Then James perused the personals. James Snowdon, late of the Barrens, had become an oil king and had taken sumptuous apartments at the Brunswick. The hotel management was using him for advertisement. He smiled again at the wiles of business.

The call boy appeared at the door at that moment with the announcement that James Snowdon was wanted on the 'phone. James hastened below and answered. He heard his uncle's voice, hollow and strained. Would James mind coming over to his office for an interview? Yes, tartly, James would mind. If wanted at any time, he was to be found at the Brunswick, Room 12.

The time was set. He did not have long to wait. A heavy tread along the hall announced the coming of the financier. And when he stood at the open door, James rose to meet him but did not advance to exchange greetings; neither did he extend an invitation to enter. Unbidden the older man, faltering, stepped inside.

"Close the door behind you," commanded James.

That order carried out, John Snowdon turned again and uncle and nephew stood facing each other, two icebergs, immovable in deep waters, awaiting the drift of a current to send them grinding against each other. Though late experiences had deepened lines in the older man's face and told on his former resolute step, yet James saw he was no mean antagonist still. He gave James one long contemptuous look, such as only he was capable of giving. He would go down, if down he went, with colors nailed to the mast. They faced each other, eye to eye, with a bitter hatred that became clashing clans in the early history of their native land. To honor gray hairs is ennoblement of character but James honored them only when they grew on honorable heads. Now he looked his contempt. And the elder Snowdon, accustomed to looking his foeman out of countenance, here was confronted with accusing eyes that withered him into insignificance.

"Why are you here?" asked James in a tone half commiseration, as he walked to a chair and sat down, still holding the older man with his riveting gaze.

"Is it your wish that I relieve you of the Barrens?" came the answer in a conciliatory voice not generally characteristic of his uncle.

"Restitution of the money of the dead is it you wish to make?" followed the bitter question.

Snowdon was far from being utterly quelled. He gave tokens of reviving. "Business is business. I am not here to indulge in old quarrels. Time with me is golden. Please answer my question, directly." And he sat stiffly upright.

"I am in the hands of Tiberius. And I await his action," was the cold, calm response.

"We are getting nowhere with your literary flights," said the elder, irritable and fidgeting. "In all fairness, I will propound the question again in another form to meet your lettered taste. If I take the Barrens off your hands, will it be a 'peace on earth good will to men' act? Or will it raise further bristles on your neck?"

James, acutely keen to the subterfuge, laughed outright. "I will grant what you most desire. You find yourself cornered. You are fully awake to the punishment that awaits you if I choose to press the button and set the bell ringing. I wish to be rid of you. I have no clear, safe title to the Barrens. As it stands, if the earth yields something of value, you are ready to reach forth and grasp it. The whole situation is complex. Clear it. If you wish to keep the name of Snowdon from the criminal docket, act quickly."

The words of James betrayed no inclination on his part to prosecute or persecute. John quickly caught at that. For him the possession of the Barrens had become doubly desirable as a means of pacifying James and a weapon to thwart the railway company.

"I wish to know if old scores are wiped out if I take over the property at the purchase price and added interest?" he put out as a feeler.

"With a relative whom I wish to shield from unsavory public notoriety—yes," replied James resuming his seat. "But," he added on second thought, "if you let me retain the land for the interest money that has accrued and you take the oil right, exclusive of any other right, and give me one-eighth royalty on the oil and gas produced, I



will take the stock at par that you hold in the little high, dry and windy railroad which is about to go to the wall, in payment, as far as it goes, and then assume your fight with the trunk line people."

The older man leaped from his seat. His face had grown years younger in one brief moment. "American finance!" he shouted. "Jamie, you're the pigeon of American high finance. Come to my arms, my boy!"

"Will you do it?" And James rose and walked to a window where he could look down into the street.

"Yes," eagerly replied his uncle. "Give me a week to collect collateral for the purchase. What of the well already down on the property?"

"Two thousand dollars for everything as it stands, to be paid in six months."

The old man had reached him by that time. "You're a pippin, Jamie—a true Scot,"—patting him on the back. "That I hed tain ye intae th' office an' made ye a halpit partner on yer comin' tae these shores, th' name o' Snowdon wad hae flourished foriver—a name lippit by th' business warl. But, God forgive me, A' went wrang. Nae sae lang a way but by yeer halp A' may turn back, ye gre't braw, laddie. Gie us yeer han', noo, Jamie."

"Havers! Quot yeer daffin for 'tis no feenished yit. Coom awa, an' spak tae me nae mair like a Scot. Ye've dealt tae hard wi' me tae lay doon th' club sae soon an' begin tae roob noses." James turned and walked to the other side of the room, very austere in his bearing. Commiseration for his uncle was beyond him. He felt he could never do better than to hold him as a dangerous dog with its teeth drawn.

The old man looked injured. His love lozenges were not to be swallowed without first tasting for the bitter. His eyes sorrowfully followed his nephew. The Scot may forgive, but his memory is very lasting and pronounced. With a sigh for a past which he clearly saw time could never obliterate, he renewed his promise to close the bargain within a week and told James to keep in touch with him during the interim. When he had finished and had walked to the door, before departing, he turned and said,

“Don’t ye think, Jamie, ye’re a wee bit hard tae nae want tae forgive?”

“Vines uptorn are slow to take root again” was the bitter reply. And James turned and walked again to the window.

## XXV

### WHAT NITROGLYCERIN DID FOR THE WILDCAT WELL

Two stirring weeks had elapsed since the events narrated in the last chapter. During the time, James had become the incontrovertible possessor of the Barrens less the oil right. And as for that, Dame Rumor and Milt Cobb linked arms to make their rounds and report that old John Snowdon had next to sold out heaven and earth to buy it. In this they were not far from truth, for it had caught him in a time of great business depression. His grasping propensity often led him to inflate beyond his securities; then when times tightened he was destined to buffet against engulfing billows; but when his ark had weathered the gale and at last rode the waves in comparative safety, his escape served each time to increase his vaunted belief that his business craft could never completely capsize no matter how rough the seas which he sailed. Somehow he managed to flourish in apparent aggrandizement on a rob-Peter-to-pay-Paul system. But now to right himself with the nephew he had wilfully wronged, he had been forced to surrender virtually all of his solid resources in exchange for the oil interest in the Barrens. So James had discovered that his uncle's actual wealth fell far short of what it was reputed.

Now, the Snowdons of Petrolia, according to Milton's version of the matter, for he always had the knack of learning hidden facts, had collected their eggs and set them all under one hen. "What if she should leave the nest? That's the conundrum," Milton would end with every time he rehearsed the subject to ready listeners, which included every one he met.

The day finally arrived when Snowdon and Son came to take possession of the oil well which accordingly was to be shot before starting to pump. With them came two automobile loads from Petrolia, one, a working gang, the other, gentry out for curiosity. By eight o'clock they

were on the grounds, the owners nervously expectant. Soon after their coming, Cad and Homer came idly sauntering down from the cabin and seated themselves on the ground, disinterested observers, but got neither look nor nod from the arrivals. John Junior, with his pompous manner, was an object of much interest. He strutted everywhere in advance of all others, handling ropes and tools with kid gloves, feigning to know the use and condition of everything.

"I believe I could walk all over the cuss if he is as big as Goliath," said Cad with a touch of envy as he viewed young Snowdon's powerful body.

"Better let out the job to Jim," returned Homer with unwilling admiration.

Just then the Nubbin Ridge clan filed out of the bushes below the well and formed a battalion in the opening.

"Has the shooter come?" It was Crab-apple Jones, the boldest soul in the ranks, calling to Cad.

"No. Better march your squad up on the hillside above the derrick. Get a better view up there and be safe," was the answer.

"Cause one drop o' that thar plaguey stuff would blow us all to the seven blazes if it happened to go off this near us," agreed Jones, alive to the power and danger of glycerine. "Come on, boys. We'll tack somewhere up thar on the hill," pointing with a crooked finger that indicated the ground just beyond his feet.

The waspish Jones then led the curious, motley crowd of old men and boys past the derrick to a sane position on higher ground.

Riley Henshaw next came rolling up with the Henshaw family. When the car came to a stand, his father stepped out but Miss Jerushy, of course, "alighted." It happened near where Cad and Homer were sitting. She made a very deferential bow to them but kept her eyes rolled heavenward. She hoped that Mr. Allen was very well, for it seemed that she had forgotten the Christmas tree episode. Yes, he was very well and flourishing like the green bay tree. But Homer wondered how she saw them, her eyes still held to the sky. She trusted their lives were not in immediate jeopardy, but in this transient life one

could never tell just how soon accidents might happen, eyes still rolled up to show nothing but the whites. Cad crept over toward Homer.

"Are we in time to see the spectacular spectacle?" she asked with anxiety.

"If you look down," replied Cad and crawled nearer Homer. She let her eyes fall and Homer clutched at Cad.

"Where's Jim?" Riley asked.

"In the cabin, asleep," Cad replied. "Gone into a state of metamorphosis and doesn't want to be aroused for a week. He's been through some trying times you know and now that it's over, he's all in. When he comes out of it, you won't know the butterfly with painted wings."

"Am I the only lady present?" Jerushy asked, keeping on Homer her spectral eyes.

"You have the honor of being the first lady ever to visit the Barrens. I believe I'll have to go up to the cabin and rout out the Baron for the occasion. He should formally receive you."

"Please do not disturb him while in a somniferous state lest you brush some of the powder from his wings, you know," she entreated while mischievous breezes played with the two fingery curls hanging over the high cheek bones.

"Rushy, you an' pap go up on the hillside an' I'll run the car up toward the cabin for safety," said Riley, starting.

Miss Jerushy turned to Pap Henshaw. "We'll go up in there somewhere," she said, pointing to a place above the road.

"We'll go up in the air somewhere, did you say?" he shouted back, placing a horn to his ear for, it will be remembered, he was terribly deaf. "Yes, I know we'll go up in the air if we don't make for the hill." Jerushy piloted him across the road and they were soon lost in the copse-wood.

Hannibal Hayhow, the lumbering hill bully, had appeared and was circulating among the "upper ten" about the well, puffed with vanity at the idea of being in the swim. Chiefly, he dogged the footsteps of the elder John who seemed to be laboring to disguise the repellent feeling he had for him, tolerant only because Hannibal had been and might still be a useful factor, for there was Jim who

yet refused to come into the league and might sometime have to be reckoned with. Therefore, he abided in the prowess of the redoubtable Hannibal, while James slumbered heavily in the cabin, free of impending fates.

From Blue Ruin, from Sunrise Valley, from Comfort, and from far beyond, curious spectators soon began to come straggling and hurrying up the road. They came on foot, on horse-back, in buggies, and in cars to witness the shooting of the Hermit Spring well. Great was the excitement in the wilderness. Last, but not least, old Milt Cobb, accompanied by Ted and Lark, came down the road from the cabin and joined Cad and Homer on their vantage-ground.

“Barnum and Bailey with their livin’ Hi-hoop-us ketched on the head waters of the Ho-ang-ho river never drawed a bigger crowd than old John has drawed this day with his wildcat well,” said Milt, badly short of breath, as he sank down heavily on the ground beside Cad.

“The shooter seems late,” returned Cad. “Heard you paid off your mortgage, recently, Milt.”

“Yes, an’ I’ve come to the belief I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth,” chuckled Milt. “I kin meet old John now on terms of equality. He tried to lick me down in his office t’other day, but I was afeared he would foreclose if I done him up a batch. Now I’m ready fer him to try it again sometime.”

The sound of wheels now came to their ears and arrested the attention of the anxious crowd—an oil well shooter with cans of nitroglycerin recklessly trotting uphill over a woods road. There was a general scurrying of all but the daring, up the hill in the direction of the cabin, without pause, till they came to a comparatively safe place from which they could plainly witness the effect of the shot.

The stout-hearted oil well shooter! He ever faces quick death until he becomes nerve-calloused, perhaps, and thinks less of the deadly load which he handles than if it were the same bulk of bad eggs. Horses halted, he springs down from the wagon, hastily fills the case from the containing cans, then runs intrepidly to the well and drops it into the hole. His work finished, he whirls and runs back to the wagon and is off before the deep detonation in the

earth is felt and heard; perhaps turns his head to catch a glimpse of the spectacular mixture as it belches up from the hole—sand, particles of rock, water, oil, as the case may be, projected high above the derrick.

Thus it came to pass in this case. The sight was awesome! A jetty stream rose high in the air and spread and spread in an umbrageous cloud before the pulverized rock and sand began to fall in a pattering shower. The crowd came running back with loud hurrahs. Cad and Homer had not shifted their position from the first, but Milt and Ted had been among the get-a-ways. They now came back and Milt resumed his old position, but Ted ran with the eager throng to the derrick.

It was noticed that the leaves of the bushes where the heaviest spray had fallen were dripping with oil of a rich amber color. Excitement ran high. There was a babel of voices. Oil under the Barrens and where might it spread! Everybody was ready to lease, buy or sell! A contagious oil fever had seized the Nubbin Ridge people. Crab-apple Jones knew that oil ran right under his farm. Jerushy Henshaw had had a dream the night before that their spring had turned to oil; thus she knew it was coming their way. One of the party who had accompanied the Snowdons from Petrolia, a grayish man with mein of wealth, offered John double the amount he had expended for the right to the territory. But Snowdon was not to be approached at this time and made it flatly understood. To his mind, how slowly, creepily the men now worked. Yet he maintained self-control. The loose rock must be crushed at the bottom of the hole and a pocket drilled. Presently the drill was run down and began to pound. Time dragged on. Not till the noon hour had been proclaimed was the hole thought to be of the proper depth; and when the drill came up, it was very noticeably quite dry. Old John shot an anxious look at his posterity. It was returned in kind. Stock was falling. The sand-pump must make one run before their appetites could be satisfied. So down it went. When it rose and rested on the derrick floor and the valve in the bottom was opened to permit the escape of sediment and fluid, the faces of the Snowdons were comparable only to those at rest in coffins. The emptyings of

the pump showed smut but—"Not nuff oil there to grease my boots," yelled Crab-apple Jones. The nitro-glycerine shot had blown it all out of the hole. It was a duster!

Snowdon, limp, sat down on the derrick door, his back propped against the forge, his chin resting on his breast, his face ashen, financially crushed. Young John stood looking down into the woods, blind and deaf to everything about him, beads of perspiration standing on his forehead. Jim lay peacefully sleeping in the cabin, unmindful of the scene below and the terrible retribution he had wrought. Had he ever thought of the weight of the blow when it would fall? It had been "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," and the oculist and dentist had made perfect work of it. In what other or better way could he have attained justice? Kind reader, it is wholly left to your candid opinion to decide.

A hush had settled over the sight-seers when the truth became known. If it were a joke, it was too huge to be appreciated at once. Presently, mumblings and smothered laughter began to be heard from various quarters. The Petrolia Snowdons had never been popular with the country people. Then someone suggested that they run the bailer again and see what it would bring up a second time. The Snowdons did not move. By this time the man who had offered the million was on his way on foot bound for Comfort where he would take the cars back to Petrolia, too confounded to rejoice over his narrow escape.

"Yes, run the bailer agin for mebbly she's gethered a head by this time,"—now came an emboldened jeer.

"Mebby she needs primin'," crowed old Milt from where he sat and had not moved since the shooting. His face wore an exultant look, his eyes constantly on the crushed pair.

"Mebby the charge was so heavy it knocked the bottom out of her and the Chinese are usin' the oil by this time to grease their pigtails," was the worst that Riley could offer. He had affiliated himself with the Allen party up by the bushes where Cadmus with a grin of mockery on his face was the central planet around which a few satellites revolved.

It was then that Hannibal Hayhow rose to the fore. He



took a posture at a corner of the derrick where he could rest one hand on a leg of the structure. And when he called for attention from the throng that still loitered through curiosity and gave no signs of leaving, Cadmus was aware that the object of the address would be to foment trouble. He steeled himself and thrust his head forward to listen.

"Fellow citizens," spoke Hannibal in a hoarse and omnious voice when all was quiet, "what have we seen pulled off here to-day? Why, you will say with me, the lowest, the meanest, the most damagin' and killin' trick played on an old gray-headed man——"

"He kin dye his hair," heckled Milt.

"——that never has been nor could be equaled," continued the speaker ignoring the remark. "None but a villian of the deepest dye, none but a devil aided by a second——" here he looked straight at Cadmus who unflinchingly met his eye—"could be guilty of sich an act and I very much doubt if the devil himself could have planned it. What has been done? What is the effect? W'y, an old man, stripped of his honest riches, changed to a beggar in the twinklin' of an eye!"

"'Tain't so," Milt heckled. "I've a hunk o' johnny-cake waitin' for old John at any time without beggin'."

Here Hannibal pointed to the subject of his humane remarks who had partially lifted his wilted head to catch the sympathetic words that fell, for in them might still be a ray of hope. "To rob his own uncle, to plan his ruin! I say Jim Snowdon deserves a rope," Hannibal continued. "And let's make him stretch one!" with an emphatic smack of his hands. At this John Snowdon's head came up erect. John, Jr. was standing by and looking ugly.

The Allen party were on their feet the moment the threat was uttered. "An' hang the two Johns on each side of him, then, for the two thieves if yet succeed," yelled old Milt, his voice charged with challenge.

"No, Cad Allen an' old Milt Cobb," Hannibal retorted.

The crowd was silent. The notion was not popular with them. Few of them believed in mob law. Besides they might meet similar justice. Hannibal bid for one more chance.

“You hain’t so forgetful, you don’t remember the performance at the Nubbin Ridge schoolhouse last winter, I hope. There the hounds rubbed it in on us for fair an’ we swallowed it. No one is safe from them. We will never know what is comin’ next. I say we rid the country of ’em!”

This, he thought, would sever Milt’s relation for the time with them. Virgil had now come down and was standing with the Allenites.

The last plea did arouse an audible grumbling. Many of them were yet sore, inwardly, over that holiday event. Old wounds began to open.

“I don’t b’lieve in hangin’. Anyway this hain’t our funeral. But a good lickin’ for the rascals to pay for the dance round the Christmas tree would be just an’ proper an’ teach ’em they can’t walk over Nubbin Ridge people in the fucher.”

It was old Sol Faldin who spoke. And he was usually deemed the most respected and conservative resident of the ridge. There was an appreciable stir. Not all were aroused. The majority would remain spectators to the flogging unless something unforeseen drew them in.

“Where is the head devil?” demanded Hayhow, starting in Cad’s direction.

“Take for the cabin an’ raise the Baron,” old Milt spoke low to Cad. “The fight must not be here—singly. The rest of us’ll cover yer retreat an’ allow time to git old Jim limbered up.” Old Milt was loyal when it came to a show-down. “I’ll answer Hayhow’s question. Run now, ye infernal fool, an’ don’t be strippin’ yer coat here. We can’t fight ’em ’thout Jim!”

“I’ll answer your question, Hayhow, you dirty sneaking knave, the tool of that pair of villains who defrauded Jim and have at last been beaten to a finish—hung with the rope they fixed for him. He is up in the cabin sleeping off the effects of several years of trouble and misery at the hands of his relatives. He has rendered unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s. Come on!” resumed Cad turning to Milt, “I’ll die right here before I run one inch from the miserable pack!”

"So say we all!" said the powerful Homer, towering above Cad.

A ring of the sturdy yeomanry of the hills closed around them, eager for the fight for fight's sake. The Allen champions were to fight with their backs together. They were greatly outnumbered and, possibly, numbers would tell.

"We'll pound 'em up—kill 'em like snakes if we kin, then tear down the cabin and finish destroyin' the den!" Hayhow ordered, making a rush for Cad. He mistook his man and was met unexpectedly by a lightning-like punch in the eye which sent him staggering back against others of his support, Cad wirily springing back.

"Take that, my esteemed townsman," yelled old Milt as he dealt a blow to Crab-apple Jones who had pressed too near and just as Homer dropped one for the same reason.

The Snowdons had leagued themselves with the mob, John, Jr. revengeful in the front ranks, the older man, broken and bent, in the rear, taking a morsel of comfort at the thought of the price Jim would pay for his victory.

"Watch out there, Riley," warned Milt. "Art Bakeman has got a stone in his hand." But he did not have time to use it before Riley felled him.

"These tactics won't work," heatedly explained John, Jr. "They are at advantage in their block formation when we advance singly. Let the whole crowd make a rush, simultaneously, the first rank drop down at their feet, the next rank work their heads and we'll soon have them down."

"Oh, there's old John! He's come to again," jeered Milt. "Hey, John! ye didn't like the way the Mississippi bubble busted that ye blowed up fer Jim, did ye? I want to git one lick at ye afore this little pleasure exertion breaks up. Ye're——" but he did not conclude his remarks. The further infuriated mob acted on the initiative of John, Jr. in one grand charge. The first in line were already ducking and grappling for the feet of the besieged, but at fearful cost, for the grunts and groans that escaped them were proof of the egregious kicks they had received in the fool-hardy move. Hayhow had singled out Cad for his victim and reached him through sheer force of numbers.

Down went the valiant Cadmus, fighting like a Trojan, several on top of him. Not for long; Homer had escaped better. He drove a foot into Hayhow's side which caused him to roll over with a groan. Then the whole crowd went down in one confused mass—kicking, striking, biting, old Milt loudly cursing above the uproar. Suddenly a wild, exultant whoop resounded near that would have curdled the blood of an Indian. "Here comes Jim!" was the shout set up by those who were not mixed in the imbroglio and so free to run. They never looked back as they fled past the derrick and down the road, for Jim Snowdon's wrath might not be confined to belligerents alone they feared, but to those agape as well! and his was the blood of a dour and determined Scottish clan, prone to practice excesses in retaliation.

It was Ted who had run to the cabin and wakened him. The boy had extreme difficulty in shaking him awake. He lay like a log benumbed. In his half-conscious state, it finally dawned on him what the boy was screaming. "The Snowdons and Hayhow are goin' to hang Cad down at the well!" Hang Cad? A sudden realization and he was very much awake! The light of wisdom born of maturity, the restraining power of civilization instantly vanished and the red demons of primitive passion seized him; his mentality harked back generations to a merciless, revengeful people. Ted was loth to believe that it was Jim Snowdon who went tearing out of the cabin with blazing eyes like some wild huge beast goaded from its lair. If it was Jim Snowdon, it was Jim Snowdon gone mad! Then seizing a revolver and thrusting it into a holder as he had seen Snowdon do, he sped after him. But not a glimpse did he catch of Jim though he bounded down the road after him like a frightened deer.

When James charged the combat-heap, he found both Hannibal and John, Jr. arrayed against Cad. Naturally their grudges had made Cad their objective. But due to the strength and athletic training of Homer and Virgil, there had been such quick changes of partners that none of the Spartan band were getting a steady beating. And Hannibal, early in the fray, had been partially rendered *hors de combat* from the kick. When Hannibal descried

Jim lining for him, he got to a sitting posture and pulled a gun from his pocket; but before he could pull the trigger, the weapon went flying into the bushes—the kick that sent it leaving him with a broken wrist. Then James dashed into the pile. Up they rose (such as could rise) in a pell-mell get-a-way, some begging mercy, others protesting their innocence, for the Allen faction was up and after them in the rout. But the chase suddenly ceased when Cad loudly yelled, “Look at old Cobb and Crab-apple Jones!”

It was a rendering of accounts of long-standing enmity—punishment meted out for deeds done in the body. They had risen, their hands clutched in each other’s long white beards. Now a yank, now a twist would screw their mouths around in the most grotesque of shapes while their eyes would bulge from the attendant extortionate pain.

“Ye’ve allus been stealin’—from me,” panted the determined Crab-apple. “I’ve allus knew where that shuck horse-collar o’ mine went.”

“It likely went—to pay for some o’ the hoop-holes—ye sneaked out o’ other people’s woods,” vehemently returned Milt, giving a strenuous downward pull which opened up Crab-apple’s mouth wide enough to swallow the proverbial whale and holding it till James loosened his hold and kindly advised old Crab-apple to follow his ilk.

“I wan’t mixed in it; jest lookin’ on when the old thief struck me!” Crab-apple whimpered by way of apology to Jim, as he gladly accepted the advice and limped away in the wake of the exodus.

The wholesale retreat had the effect of mollifying James. Hatless, he tossed the brown forelock out of his eyes and drew up his loosened collar. Hands on his hips he stood looking on the scene below him where his vanquished cousin was hastily cranking his machine to escape his hands. The older man had crawled into the car. Then the face of the Baron became a study. No sign of enmity lurked there. It had passed away. Instead came a look of sadness, as if willing to assume the price of his uncle’s atonement. Yet his face betrayed no remorse at having brought John Snowdon to judgment. “And be sure your sin will find you out,” it is written.

“‘How are the mighty fallen!’” Virgil exclaimed to break the spell, looking at the hurried preparations for an early departure.

Then James with a hand raised as though in a truce to dispel the idea of further hostility ran quickly down the hill where John, Jr. was turning the car.

“One moment, please, before you go,” he entreated and John, Jr. granted the request but sat with averted head, doggedly sullen. The elder, defeated to a finish, financially wrecked and humiliated, raised a hand that shook as palsied and spoke in a husky voice, “Now, you come to drive another nail into my coffin, I suppose. James, perhaps, I might have become reconciled to your move to throw me back the dross for which I took your father’s money. But this last act! Why did you not tell me all after I had made reparation and spared me this?” waving his hand toward the wildcat well.

“Because I did not go to a confessional when I signed the paper that granted you a right,” replied James, looking uprightly into the steel gray eyes from which the fires of greed were now all burned out. “Besides, your Calvary would not have been replete without the crown of thorns. You have paid the debt in full measure. You suffer now as my father and I have suffered at your hands. You go now clean-handed, I trust, to begin life anew. I bear you no ill-will as you leave me to-day. I have finished.”

“Dan, the avenging angel,” snorted John, Jr. and started the car.

“Take me home, Riley,” wailed Jerushy Henshaw now crashing out of the bushes. Riley hurried her away.

“And the last big fight over the Barrens was fit out in a real old dog-fashioned way,” wheezed old Milt, when James came back to join the “Allen Clan.” Milton was busily engaged making necessary repairs on his tattered costume before he could hope to travel. Then with fun wrinkles around his eyes he added: “I think old Crab ’ll have to do some patchin’, too, afore he emerges into the clearin’. Use leaves likely.”

“Never mind, Milt,” said Cad. “When we get to the cabin, I’ll drape you with one of the Baron’s most elaborate mantles to make your triumphal march into the open.”

“Come on, boys,” invited James, suavely, taking the lead. “A dinner, then an after-dinner cigar in the cool shades may tend to turn us from brutes to men again.”

“What’s that?” It was Cad who spoke. They stopped to listen.

“That, sir, is a blast from the Hillside-Mooney’s horn on yonder hill,” declared Milt, stoutly. “Big changes are soon to foller.”

The revival of Milt’s legend of the hills caused an exchange of winks. Ted, however, kept closely to James the remainder of the way to the cabin.

## XXVI

### AFTER FIVE YEARS

Since the finish of the "wildcat well," years had come and gone till five were passed. Not only had fleeting time carved many changes on the face of the Barrens, but it had been an epoch-marker as well in the lives of many of the characters familiar in this homely tale of the hills. "Brevity is the soul of wit." Therefore we employ the sentiment to advantage and briefly recount events.

The railway company of the trunk line had at slight depreciation relieved James of the stock which he held in the "peg-leg" road through the deal with his uncle. James in return had granted a free right of way for the new road to traverse the Barrens. The "Branch" followed the defile up Hazel Fork; and when the hill in the divide had been tunneled, vast deposits of coal were revealed underlying the gaunt rock-ribbed hills. Then sprang into existence, much as the mushroom rises in the night, the mining town of Snowdon in the vale below Hermit Spring and on the hillsides.

What of Jean MacCrea? Of Jim and Jean and Cad, caught in the meshes of a triangular love plight? It had been no passing heart affair to be turned aside lightly—to be solved and satisfied. Heartaches born of love pale those born of other griefs. It was at a time when James could see no happiness for any of them as things stood that he stepped aside and left for the oil fields of Oklahoma. Back from there he sent his blessing with an assurance to Jean that she would never regret marriage with Cad. But the happy pair were not quite happy. The sacrifice of James cast a shadow over both. Naturally the very announcement of the conjugal ties stirred Auntie MacIntyre to wrathful tears. That was all. She held her tongue. But when Jean had gone from the house for the last time, every room was darkened save the kitchen where Auntie betook herself and existed on a single cup of tea



for a day. To the inquiries of consoling neighbors her answer was unalterable: Jean had married a "woods-heck" to live in a cabin and rue the day.

Jean had gone with some misgivings to Hermit Spring to live, first in the cabin which James had left open for them until the very modern bungalow could be attached—also James's specification. It had been his wish that they go there after he had made Cadmus manager of all his eastern interests. He had also placed mining stock in the way of Cadmus which would in time place the Allens in affluence.

The house now stood completed with all its modern innovations, the grounds beautifully gardenized. There was the fountain pouring from the base of Big Ben; the miniature lake, a mirror of sylvan shades; fern-bordered paths under arched trees festooned with the wild grape-vine and woodbine. Though Snowdon Park was beyond the sound of maddening throngs, it was not isolated. For from below, came the sounds of throbbing life from the mining village and the locomotive screaming through the valley.

After five years.

"Cad, I can endure life here no longer."

Quietly Jean had come out to the little summer-house where Cad lounged, resting before his return to the office at the mines. She stood close beside him before he was aware of her presence.

He sat up and knocked the ashes from his briar pipe. "Yes, Jean," he replied, his voice deeply sympathetic. He did not raise his eyes to meet hers. He had been expecting this. Soon after they settled down at Hermit Spring she had changed from her accustomed happy mood. That he had noticed. Not that her love for him had grown colder, but she had saddened. Why, he had not exactly known but conjectured. He had been the most devoted of husbands, granting her every wish. True he had been engrossed with business demands much of the time; but to keep the house enlivened they were rarely without guests from Petrolia when she herself had not been absent from home. He now sat in silence, waiting.

James Snowdon Allen—Jamie—a sturdy three-year-old

with sunny hair and mischievous eyes came running after his mother with faithful old Lark, and his little cart. From the folds of her dress, he began a game of hide-and-seek with his "daddy-boy." Cad raised his head without meeting Jean's eyes and held his arms out appealingly to the little fellow, still maintaining silence.

"Not that I"—Jean faltered, unconscious of the child at play, "not that I"—her voice failed her.

"Not that I love Allen less but Snowdon more," he interpolated, not accusingly, but deeply compassionate, as if he alone had committed an irreparable wrong by entering into the course of their lives. If the words were poignant with bitterness for Jean such was not the purpose. She had chosen unwisely between them and this was the price of her decision.

Hesitating she stood in sweet defiance; her chin quivered. "Not that I have reason to complain of life here, Cad," she faltered, catching up the thread of unfinished thought in seeming disregard of what might have been intended for a probe. He had taken Jamie into the hammock with him, the child heedlessly throwing leaves down at the dog. "Oh, Cad, why did we come here, blind fools that we were! Any place but here where every object wears an accusing face to remind me of him." Her hands fell and her face turned white. "Take me, take me from this place forever, Cad, lest—lest your unborn child bears the accursed mark of one of these mock faces of the Barrens!"

Before she had finished he was at her side and caught her as she was about to fall. "Don't, Jean," he entreated and I'll take you away from this hated place today—anywhere you wish to go—today, Jean."

"Don't call it hated, Cad, for after I am gone from here, memories of the Barrens may call him back to them."

He took her arm and gently led her back toward the house. Little Jamie and old Lark followed, the dog drawing the cart. "I see it all now, Jean," he ventured as they walked slowly along, after she had grown calmer. He bent his head and kissed her. "It is clear now, clear as day. The artful Snowdon, again! He knew the place would haunt you. He bound us to it with sham kindness. The Barrens figures as a place to suit all his purposes.

The Snowdons of Petrolia met his revenge here. Now, we. But, Jean, dear heart, we will defeat him yet. Once away from here you will love me again, love me as you did before we fell into his trap." He kissed her again.

"Please don't speak of him that way, Cad," she pleaded. "I believe he would lay down his life for us. You, Cad; think of what he has done for you. Look at your position at the mines. How could we ever become so ungrateful as to believe him false?"

"The gods first woo whom they destroy. And from this little scene here today I judge he has about succeeded. But we'll defeat his purpose yet—if purpose it is. We will move."

"Where to, Cad."—her lips trembling.

"You must say, Jean."

"Then to Petrolia, for a time at least. I know of a homey little cottage for rent or for sale right beside Aunty MacIntyre's."

"And that old hen to finish me up," he interrupted, laughing so in his old buoyant way that she could not take offense.

After he had left her seated on the veranda to return to his office in the village, she watched him till he passed down over the hill from sight. Tall and strong and handsome, he had changed since their marriage and become more manly, sobered with cares—and she? Her eyelashes quivered and the mists rose again. Why had her love for him gradually died? She had striven to hold the last spark but that, too, had gone out. Was it from mere shallowness? At the outset she had loved Cad with that passionate love which is apt to be temporary and changeable. Her feeling for Snowdon was of slower growth—not a surging of the senses, but a love for his attainments, his ideals, his stability in a world of transitory tests.

"Oh Cad" she sobbed helplessly, "why was it not manifest to me at the time. Dear Jim! To him I owe everything but existence. I have made three hearts miserable. Well, Cad knows me now in my true light and instead of spurning me, he pities. We will go from here, and sights

to keep Jim constantly before me will be removed. Then I will live faithful to Cad though it eats out my heart."

She drew a deep sigh but not of relief. Just then the nurse-girl came to her and woefully announced that Jamie had knocked down the bird-cage and killed the songster. It was a mocking-bird that James had sent them from Oklahoma!

Hidden within the deep shadows of a rhododendron tangle that grew near the border of the lake, had lurked two men while Jean and Cad had talked over their difficulty. Much of the conversation had been audible to the pair. After they had watched Cad leave the house and disappear down the hill, they stealthily crept out and, after making a careful survey of the premises to make sure no one was within sight, they stole to the water's edge and lay hidden again in a rank growth of cat-tails and sedges. They were poachers. One of them, middle-aged and well-dressed, bore the earmarks of a city sport out for recreation. The other was every inch old Milt Cobb, wearing that same old raccoon smile.

"I tell you, Cobb, I feel small in this sort of business," spoke low the city man. He eyed the water and demurred at adjusting tackle to begin.

"I stocked this water, I tell you, Shonts, without pay an' I'm only takin' my own share. I take this way to git 'em without a jaw. I detest quarrelin'," irritably responded the crafty Milt as he dropped in his hook. He soon brought out a speckled beauty that settled it with his more scrupulous companion who now dropped in, hoping for equally good luck.

After they had fished for some time in silence with fair success and the novelty had worn off somewhat for Shonts, he spoke low. "My, but that girl was a ripping beauty! She must be in some deep trouble, though, with that fellow."

"Shet up, damn ye, if ye expect to ketch fish. Loved Snowdon 'n' married Allen," Milt grumbled.

Shonts was curious to know more. "Seems as if the unlucky fellow has broken her heart since with kindness."

"Exactly that. I'm goin' to write him that he's cooked up another pair on the Barrens. He's sharper 'n a hook.

Now shet up, will ye. If Allen happens back 'n' ketches us, he'll throw us both into the pond."

It happened just as forecasted. Old Milt started to rise at a noise behind him when he was sent headlong into the water with a "souze." The other had barely risen when he, too, went under without baptismal rites. Cad had been coming back to Jean with a message, too glad to use the 'phone, that he had secured by wire the cottage which she craved in Petrolia. As he crossed the Park, he had smelled tobacco smoke which aroused his curiosity and he had stolen around the pond to find the Isaak Waltons busy at work. He coolly picked up their basket of fish and hastened away without a word.

## XXVII

### BACK TO THE BARRENS

When news of the Texas oil finding first spread abroad, James Snowdon of Oklahoma had been among the early adventurers to arrive in that field with an eye to exploitation. He secured holdings which had proven prolific. Added to the Oklahoma oil production he already possessed, they increased his wealth by leaps and bounds. With his increasing riches, his generosity widened accordingly. Back in Pennsylvania the miners of Snowdon village dwelt in contentment due to his unstinted philanthropy. And there was the case of his vanquished relatives in Petrolia. He had not left his uncle in disgrace and poverty, but had secured for him oil interests in the West which started him on the road to fortune again, this time fairly found. And now old John, in his westerling years, was living in a prairie town, in comparative comfort; and surely with clearer conscience than during his fleece-shearing time in the East.

It was midday, and Snowdon had just bowled into Tulsa from Texas. Tulsa was his homing town when business did not call him to other fields. Begrimed with the sands of the plains and bronzed by winds, he alighted from his car and hurried into the hotel and to his suite. A bath and a change from dusty clothing served to revive his drooping spirits for his arrival was fraught with disappointment; he had expected Ted there, home from Yale to meet him. He ordered his mail and dinner sent up to his room and in the seclusion of his den he began on the large file of letters before the conclusion of the meal. The first was a brief note from Ted. He would be home Thursday. Snowden anxiously glanced at the calendar.

"Tomorrow," he audibly commented and the look of loneliness on the grave, handsome face brightened some-

what. He took up the next letter and tore open the seal. It read:

“Nubbin rige, 21st of June, an’ a hot one, A. d. in the year of our Lord.

“Deer fren Jim—

“Not heerin’ from ye for a coon’s age, I take my pen in hand to reknew ol’ acquaintance an’ let ye no the inside workins of some of the dewins way back home.

“Ye remembere Ed Shonts of Petrolia? He an’ I went fishin’. We had splendid luck, ye’ll agree, for while we’s hidin’ under the laurel by yer pond, waitin’ for Cad to git away—ye see he was takin’ his rest in a summer-house by the pond—wal, Jane she comes down for a heart to heart talk with ’im and we heard their hull trouble. She don’t love ’im Jim, an’ who could? She’s crazy she didn’t git you, I think by her talk. She sees ye in ev’ry thing about the place; ye han’t her like, and ev’rything wears a mockin’ face because she turned ye down. They’re goin’ to move right away. He thinks ye fixed ’em up there a purpose so’s the sight of everything will hant ’em. Yes, they’re goin’ right away—hook ’n’ line, to town an’ leave Snowdon Park forever. Wal, if ye did set ’em up there in the fine style that ye did, to throw coals of fire on their heads, ye’ve succeeded beyond yer fondest hopes, I assure ye. Jane would give her eyes to change husbands, but she’s doomed.

“What luck did I ’n’ Ed have? O, after they’d gone, we got at it, but Ed couldn’t keep his big mouth shet nor keep from smokin’ ’n’ Cad come back up from Snowdon fer suthin’ ’n’ heard us ’n’ smelt the smoke ’n’ slipped up on us ’n’ dipped us. Ibyy laffed.

“I went to meetin’ last Sunday in the skoolhouse. Elder Wilder filled the pulpit in his able manner. He took his text from the forty-twoth chapter of Eye-brows.

“Wal, Jim, it’s gittin’ late ’n’ I can’t see to rite very good, so I’ll seek my hay.

“Call when ye come home. I’ve bilt a new pig-pen with dubble floor an’ three pertitions. Looks first strait.

“Yours in deep distress,

“Milton Cobb Esquire.

“P. Q.—The hill-side mooney is a tootin’ of his horn agin. We may look for big events. Milt.

“P. Q.—Jerushy Henshaw is dead. She died when the moon was at its full. She was resigned and said she wan’t afeared to make the supreme sacrifice. I attended the devotional exercises for the departed. There was lots of flowers ’n’ good music. But I had sich an awful headache I didn’t enjoy myself very well. They sure did gin Jerushy a beautiful ride to the berryin’ ground an’ everything paid up. An’ that makes me think how thankful I am that I’ve got nuff laid by so’s when I go I can be berried without passin’ the hat.

“Milt.”

Snowdon’s fingers relaxed at the finish, and the missive dropped to the floor. Old Milt was prone to equivocate, but a psychological conviction warned him that old Milt was telling the truth. He ordered the unfinished dinner removed, then rose very much unnerved and threw himself down on a couch, his face buried in his hands.

“I feared the day would come,” he groaned, “when she would awaken and realize Cad is not her mate. Had she but waited the coming years of riper mind when ideals are stabilized! But it is not given youth to wait. Yes, Jean, you are no longer a girl with your heart on your sleeve but a woman now to know and suffer. Well, I did the right, the only thing. I was not fit to mate with radiant youth; besides I am not sure but that the best within my heart is buried forever beneath the clods in a kirkyard. But they played fair with me. I am sure they never would have wedded had I not left the field to them and extended my blessing. Jean may have thought it was my heart-felt wish. God knows and pity her—pity them both! And they believe, he believes, that I, adroitly, managed to place them where scenes would forever call me back to her mind and alienate her love. Has there been a devil in it and I the instrument, No! It mattered not where they were. It was bound to happen. Well, I only know there are three sore hearts today; and tomorrow——”



"A telegram for you, Mr. Snowdon."

The voice was in another room where a messenger boy had stepped inside from the hall, unannounced. Snowdon sprang up to meet the call. The lad, cap in hand, handed him the envelope. James paid the charges and the boy promptly departed.

Snowdon broke the seal.

"Jean and Cad seriously injured. Come immediately."  
Signed by Riley Henshaw.

He reeled and clutched at a chair for support. From his frame on the wall Abraham Lincoln looked down with the deep eyes of a great soul, in pity. But not till several minutes later when the clock struck two, did Jim rally. Only half an hour to make the train that would start him on his way back to the place where he had purposed never to return. At the warning of the clock, his strength returned and his one thought now was to get there as soon as possible. He tore around like a mad-man, unthinking in hurried preparations.

## XXVIII

“AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS THAT AT EVENING TIME  
IT SHALL BE LIGHT”

That a spirit was soon to take its flight was plainly told by the unnatural light that shone in the eyes of Cad Allen. His passing was coming at a time when the sun in golden glory was sinking beyond the distant Barrens which could be seen from the window of the room where he lay in the Florence Nightingale Hospital in Petrolia. His mind had been clouded till now; but at last after days of suffering, all mists were cleared away. Bolstered up with pillows, he could look away to the hill-tops of the Barrens, bathed in the sunset, a scene that he had loved so well. But soon there came a questioning look in his eyes as he turned them to meet those of Mother MacIntyre who had been summoned from another ward, where Jean lay unconscious much of the time. She had come to comfort him, and when he asked for Jean, it was to wring her heart afresh.

With a hand clasping his, she began in tremulous voice which threatened to break at every word, “There, my poor laddie, dinna worrit for Jean. She may be wi’ ye veery soon, noo. No much o’ th’ time she kens what’s aroond her an’ juist calls, calls for ye, laddie. What may be on her min’, A’ cannae tell; but she’s sayin’ tae come back tae her for noo her love is deep again,—” he listened feverishly, “tae come tae her for she lo’es ye wi’ a new love she neever felt afore. That she has been the cause o’ yeer—yeer deith an’—an’ then she prays tae God tae dee hersel; an’, Oh, laddie, if what she says be true—Oh, it cannae be—what means it—A’m crazy wi’—th’—thought; but A’m thinkin’ she’ll be wi’ ye veery soon, noo.”

At the foot of the cot sat Riley and old Milt, their heads bowed in their hands. Not a day had passed that they had not come to the hospital personally to inquire. From the first, Riley had had grave apprehensions for

Cad's recovery. Today when they had been told that the patient could not survive the night, they had waited. At times old Milt had carried petty grouches but when it came to death, his grief was truly pathetic. And Riley found himself utterly broken down at the final struggle, for his love for Cad had been a brotherly love.

"And, Jamie—where—is my boy," Cad falteringly asked of the old woman as if fearful of the truth.

"Oh, laddie," moaned old Elspeth MacIntyre, swaying back and forth for that was the question she most dreaded, "th' bairnie is—is just a short time afore ye tae th' Land o' th' Leal where ye'll meet again an' God will wipe awa' all tears. Noo, be brave, laddie. Jean aften telt me hoo gude an' kin' ye waur tae her an' th' bairnie, an' A'm wi'oot a doof that God will tak' ye tae His bosom. But why couldn't it hae been auld Elspeth MacIntyre who is bent an' auld tae gae an' spared ye for a useful life tae come, A' woonder. But He kens weel, an' ony way, yee'll be but a short time afore us at the maist. But A'd gie my life gladly tae spare ye, laddie, for—for——" she utterly failed on the word Jean.

The expression on the face of the dying man had changed. His Jamie, his idol, the little boy who always ran with skipping feet to meet him had suffered and proceeded him in death. He remembered now how by the impact of the collision of the cars the child with his mother had been thrown down an embankment; then the rest had become oblivion. A perfect peace now came over him, a hope of meeting his child in a happier land. And, then, another thought! Jean! His lips parted. He could only gasp and wait for strength to speak again. Mother MacIntyre's ear was at his lips! What she caught was: "Tell Jean—and Jim—my wish—was—that they—that they——"

"Oh God!" groaned the old woman, "hoo can auld Elspeth." But at the look of pain that stole across his face she nerved herself again, her frame shaking. "Yes, laddie, juist for tae please ye and for nae ither reason wad A' try tae yoke theem thegither," she finished bitterly. Then she added to herself, "Aye 'tis a beeter cup tae taste—match making ower th' deid."

Riley now came and stood over them, with blanched

face, too agonized to speak. It was Cad's will that had made him assistant superintendent of the firm operating the Barrens. It was to Cad he had ever turned for advice. And Cad's indulgent smile was the nearest approach to reprimand that he had ever received for any blunders committed. As he looked down on that face, smiling even in death, he collapsed utterly and sank down beside the bed, a burly, convulsive heap, his face buried in the bed-clothes, and sobbed in free abandonment to grief.

A tall, somber shadow now came swiftly from somewhere and bent over the sorrowing forms. Cad's glassy eyes turned up to the stranger. Instantly he was possessed of renewed vitality. Striving to raise one feeble hand he uttered the glad, startled cry of "Jim!"

Down beside Riley Jim sank and grasped both Cad's hands within his own. Was this the Cad whom he had last seen in the flush of manhood? Fast friends they had been and the cord had been severed by a human event over which neither had any control. There had never existed any animosity between them. Recurrent thoughts brought no bitterness, only a tinge of sadness. Their eyes locked and Jim's mind reverted quickly back to the yesterdays when Cad, a happy, irresponsible boy, had linked fortunes with him to remain forever steadfast through weal or woe.

"Dear old—Jim!—Will you—carry me back—to the—?" Cad gasped and could say no more.

"Yes, Cad, to the Barrens," was the husky reply as Jim's hands gripped tighter, "there to sleep in the place we loved so well; there both will await the Judgment, together."

The peace that replaced the look of anxiety on the face of Cad Allen was proof that James's answer had removed all doubt from his troubled mind that the ties of their friendship had ever been broken. But the moments were fleeting! His head began to roll on the pillows.

"Jamie—Jean, where are you? Oh, I see you now," he said. "It grows so dark. Yes, Jamie boy, I am coming. Isn't the way beautiful! Yes, Jean, you are—reaching out your hands to me now. I see you. How I loved you, Jean! You were a lamp unto my feet and you were true."

"Yes," said Jim softly. "She could be nothing else, dear laddie."

"I never intended—bad," the voice went on. "I never tried—to cheat,—nor lie; I didn't fight—only to save myself; I didn't throw old Milt—into the pond—to be mean."

"He ought to drowned me," whimpered old Milt, shaking violently.

"And I am—not afraid!" bravely cried the dying man.

"He was as innocent at the last as a baby!" cried old Milt from the depths of his heart.

"Yeer dyin' a graun' deith, laddie," moaned old Elspeth, "an' A'm free tae tak' the waurd tae Jean yeer gang tae God."

Now his breath came shorter. One gasp—and the spirit of Cad Allen took its flight just as the sun dropped beyond the Barrens.

The nurse, her eyes on the floor, moved softly about the room. Soft strains from a harp came from somewhere across the street. Old Elspeth MacIntyre was slow to go. And after she rose to her feet with Jim's help, she stood silently looking at the sleeper, his face so peaceful in death! Then she turned away, wiping her eyes, and moved slowly out of the room, followed by Riley and Milt. Jim remained alone with the dead.

## XXIX

### BACK TO SCOTLAND

Old Elspeth MacIntyre knew she was nearing the end of her days. Her physician had settled that question in her mind. He had given an evasive answer when she had pointedly asked if it were not time to set her house in perfect order. True, he had not told her there was immediate danger; but she would not have been startled anyway. Death was a purely business matter with her. To be right with the world and love the Master's Word had been her creed and she was fearless of the Judgment. Why wish to wait longer when most of her friends were across on the other side. She welcomed the hour when her tired hands would be folded on her breast for her last long rest. That was always her answer to Jean.

It was in old Elspeth's home that Jean Allen had been fostered back to something like life. It was due to old Elspeth's logic that she had gained the belief that life yet held an urgent call for her again. The old woman's manner was austere but convincing. A year and over it had been since she had wrought this change in Jean; had persuaded her to live for others if she did not care to live for herself. At times when the past would come down upon her like an overwhelming avalanche, grim old Elspeth would maintain with much pathos of voice and a mournful shake of the head that "the Lord loveth whom He chasteneth" and bid the girl go about her work with the heart of a Christian soldier instead of a craven deserter. For Jean had volunteered as a worker in social welfare in the dark tenements of Macaroni Alley.

Then when old Elspeth could go about no more, she would anxiously await the hour for her devotee to return from her mission work. But as time shortened for the old woman, Jean ceased her errands of mercy and gave her

time solely to the comfort of one whom she loved, "with a love that passeth all understanding."

Old Elspeth's children were with her almost constantly now, dreading the hour when they would be bereft. Tenderly they watched over her, but tonight she had asked to be alone with Jean for a time. At the call, Jean came from her room where she had been resting. Trembling down the stairs she crept in the belief that the end was coming. Old Elspeth sat bolstered up in a chair, her wrinkled face as white as the pillow against which it lay. She raised her head when Jean entered the room. Jean assumed a cheery smile and after kissing her seated herself by her side, fondly taking one of her hands. The nurse went out, leaving them alone together.

"A'm gang awa', Jean,"—Jean choked back a sob while the clasp of the old woman's hand tightened—"veery soon, noo, but dinna greet, chiel, for A' lang tae be at rest. A' can nae dee wi'oot A' discharge a sacred duty, a promise A' made tae th' dead. A'm gang tae tell ye, noo, some o' th' last waurds that fell frae th' lips o' yeer gude laddie juist afore he left this warl." Jean was all aquiver but bent her ear closer to catch the feeble words. "An' A'm sure he spak them frae his heert." Here the old woman paused as though troubled about what she was to tell. "He got frae me th' promise A'd—tell ye he wanted ye and Meester Snowdon tae be marrit. It was accordin' tae hees wish, Jean." Jean's head had dropped on her bosom and though the room was bright with the firelight, to her everything had grown dark. So Jean did not hear old Elspeth to the end.

Three days later when the bell from the belfry of St. Cyr was tolling the years of Elspeth MacIntyre's span of life, Jean Allen, crumpled and white, half lay in a reclining chair by the open window, while each muffled stroke smote her like a knell of doom. She had suffered a nervous breakdown which forbade her following the remains to their last resting place. Oblivious to any future, she only knew now that the people were slowly moving out of the vestibule, many to go their ways and soon forget, while a few sorrowing friends would follow on across the river and out to Greenwood where the earth had opened to

receive the dearest, the truest friend she had known since she left her native land. Yes, Jean Allen unequivocally felt this, forgetful of one who that day, moved by commiseration of heart, had come from the Barrens to witness from the background the last sad rites paid to the kindly spirit who had ministered to those whom he loved most of all earthly friends. It was so long since she had seen Jim Snowdon, that the gulf she herself had widened between them, caused her to forget him in her misery. True, he had taken Cad and her little boy back to the Barrens and placed them in a mausoleum on the hillside; but the expense would be defrayed, she thought, from the estate. When she had gone out to visit her dead on the days set apart for the keeper of Snowdon Park to come to the vault and unlock the iron gates, she had never seen James, whom she sought to avoid. Thus in the blindness of her sorrow, she little dreamed he was standing outside the church door at the moment, watching the funeral cortege as it passed, seeking to catch a glimpse of her. He was aware she was living in a state of melancholy. People had told him that. But whatever her dreams, he would never present himself in her path to disturb them. Let the tide bear them separately out to sea and if they drifted together again, it would be the will of Fate.

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*            \*

One morning, while seated on the veranda at Snowdon Park, James noticed by the Petrolia paper that Mrs. Jean Allen, of Chestnut Avenue, would soon sail for Scotland, the land of her nativity.

He whistled for the dog and started out the by-path that led down around the hill to the vault.

"Back to Scotland. 'Tis a bonnie land to turn to when one is heartsore," he sadly mused as he stopped to pluck some orchids that grew in a damp, shady place by the way. "Time eliminates all things; but it is slow in the lives of some." He looked at the handful of the rare, beautiful blooms he held, remembering they were the only flowers that he had ever seen Cad notice; then he slowly sauntered on, his thoughts shrouded with the past, and repeated from sad memory, the stanza:



“Ye banks and braes o’ bonnie Doon,  
How can ye bloom sae fresh and fair;  
How can ye chant, ye little birds,  
And I sae weary fu’ o’ care?  
Thou’lt break my heart, thou warbling bird,  
That wanton’st through the flowering thorn;  
Thou mind’st me o’ departed joys,  
Departed—never to return!”

Presently he reached the level opening in the growth on the steep hillside. The vault was just back of it in the great gray rock softened by the warm green of moss where the hill rose abruptly steep. His step was slow and soft, for to him it was a deeply hallowed spot. He had come to visit the dead, alone, and to place the orchids by Cad. First he walked to a thorn tree and sat down on the ground beneath it where he loved to grow reminiscent. He was now left alone. Even Ted would not be with him any longer. Ted had finished his university course and was abroad now for voice culture under foreign masters. And Jean—impossible! He was suddenly roused from his reverie by hearing the dog bark in the bushes near the vault, for a cry had come from that direction. Now it was repeated, scarcely audible, but longer drawn! He leaped up and reached the shelter of a plum and grape cover and crept in with no slight trepidation. With scarcely a sound he crept on through till by peering out he could see beyond. There, kneeling before the gate with upstretched arms resting against the heavy iron grating, was the figure of a woman. Her face was upturned, but from him, and the heavy crepe veil she wore reached to the ground behind her. Beside her, was a basket of flowers. He waited.

“Oh, Cad and my bonnie bairnie, I will not cease to think of you when I am in a foreign land,” her tremulous voice began, “but I will return again; and when the time comes—and speed the day—for me to take my rest, if I cannot rest between you, I hope it may be very near. I do not know what leads me back to Scotland yet a voice bids me go; but I will come again.” Here Jean Allen turned her face at a sound from behind her. Jim Snowdon, impelled by an irresistible power, was walking toward her.

She sprang away and wildly gazed at him as though she were seeing him for the first time.

"Jean, surely you cannot refuse to let me share your sorrow, for our sorrow is in common," he imploringly began as he held out his hands toward her.

"I cannot refuse your mission," she sadly and evasively replied as she stooped to pick up her basket. "I thought I would lay these flowers at the gate for I am going far away. I knew the keeper would not be here today and I only thought to——" here her voice failed her and she turned her face toward the vault.

"Jean, I have the keys. I came, too, with flowers. May we not go in together and share our grief," he pleaded, taking a step toward the gate.

"I cannot refuse one who comes on the same sad mission," she answered mechanically.

The answer pierced his heart! It was to be Jean Allen to the end and never the Jean of former days. He unlocked the gate and slowly swung it open. The creaking sound caused her to clutch his arm for support. He took one trembling hand in his and they entered the arched ante-chamber, the walls and floor plastered with gray cement. He then took her basket of garlands, added his own, and set them down on the floor. Then he proceeded to open the solid iron door of the crypt proper which swung back, grating on its hinges. His next act was to pull a cord opening an air shaft connected with a fissure in the rock somewhere at the farther end of the cavern. This would correct the atmosphere of the closed place, somewhat, in a short time. While waiting, he turned and ventured a glance at her again, and thought of a pale wood-lily, trampled and crushed. She gazed at nothing, saw nothing—dumb in her sorrow. He now regretted opening the vault. It was only to open wounds anew, he felt. But now he must go on.

"Wait till I enter first," he said.

He took the flowers and left her. After he had lighted a large, burnished oil-lamp, standing on an altar of stone, which shed a pale glow over the gray walls, he returned and took her by the hand and slowly led her to the caskets, then paused between them.

She took flowers from the basket and tremblingly strewed them over the dead while Jim divided his token of love and did likewise. Then began the plaint, old Elspeth had most dreaded. "Oh, I am the cause of all this!" she cried.

"No, Jean! It is not true! I must speak to you but not in the presence of the dead. Come." There was a tremor in his command which stirred Jean's shattered trust. Their eyes met—his pleading, pitying—and the haunted look left hers. She felt assured he sought to challenge the cause of her affliction. Let him pass upon it. He would speak truth. If in his judgment the burden fell upon her, then let the smouldering fires rekindle and burn on until her being was consumed. His faith and strength would enable him to judge aright.

"Yes, Jim, I will hear you after you know how deeply I am at fault," she tearfully faltered. "There is a seat outside. I must rest."

After the vault had been closed and they were seated in the pure air and sunlight he looked at her squarely and took the lead in the ordeal. "Your love for Cad failed you, Jean, though you struggled against it."

She returned him a quick look of wonder and asked, "How came you to know this?"

"You came to regard Snowdon Park as a torture, a constant reminder of me, and when you disclosed this to Cad, he suspected I had schemed to alienate your love."

"How can you know?" she gasped.

"Milt Cobb overheard your conversation that morning by the pond."

She leaned back in her seat, covered her face with her hands and relapsed into painful silence.

"Yes, I blundered, Jean, in starting you out in married life at Snowdon Park. I blundered." His voice evinced sadness but yet was firm. "All through the course of life, we blunder, apparently; yet whatever happens, is it not the plan mapped out for us? If it was wrong for me to place you at Snowdon Park, does not the burden fall upon me? In your helpless flight you were overwhelmed. Then, if you were innocent in your purpose, you are held guiltless.

"No one is more wretched than I," he continued, for

she made no reply. "Cad was to me something more than a friend. Yet I do not deem it right to allow my blundering share in his death to wreck the remainder of my life. Your little boy! God does not give such precious gifts. He only lends. At His own disposed time He calls for a return. You seem to assume that the child was taken to punish you. Punish you for what?" At the question she still maintained a silence and he continued:

"To mortals, power is not given to create love nor yet to quench it. It was Cad's wish as well as yours to leave the Barrens. It was by his chosen way, his car, that you were leaving. How are you accountable? Let only those pay penance who deliberate death."

At the close of his talk, she still sat with bowed head, unconsciously fraying the lace on the edge of her handkerchief. Her downcast face had lost none of its set palor. There was a silence for a few moments unbroken save for the sound of busy life in the valley below. Since her attitude seemed unchanged, he looked at the ground, wondering whether he had not spoken truths too bruskiy, said things that pained.

It was she who broke the silence. "If you know that I did not love Cad at the last, it does not follow that I do not love his memory."

"And that can never die if memory clings to you as it does to me."

He rose for she began to make ready to depart.

"Did you come up through the growth from Snowdon alone?" he asked.

"No. I have friends waiting for me below here with a car. They are gathering flowers while I take my farewell," she replied with clearly felt appreciation for his concern, in her voice something of its old-time friendliness. She kept her head bowed while she gave him her hand but he felt a warm tear fall on the clasp. Still without meeting his eyes, she turned and walked slowly away. When she had neared the edge of the thick growth below, he called, "Jean, will ye no grant me juist anither waurd afore ye depart tae tak' yeer lang, lang voyage."

She turned and in her own sweet dialect answered, "What, be it, Jem? Is it tae bring ye sprays o' heather

plucked frae th' hills aroond yeer ain hame? Or tae veesit the kirkyard an'—an' lay soom o't ower th' heids o' theem that sleepit far frae yeer ain care? A've lang had it een ma min'."

"Baith," he answered disconsolately and watched her slowly disappear down the hillside.

## XXX

### AMERICA

Jean Allen's flight over the sea yielded no heart-balm. Years had wrought changes in the familiar faces of her childhood days; thus she found herself virtually among strangers, though they were kind and welcomed her back. Scotland is a bonnie land of woody glens, clear lakes and heathery moors, and the bag-pipes still shrill on the keen Highland air. Jean wandered wide and loved it all, yet the cramped environments which kept the people struggling for thrift, soon set her pining for free and unrestrained America. Though obscurely, this longing was imparted to James in the letters he frequently received from her. When at length one came stating that, strive against it as she might, her face would ever turn toward the West, it was then that the Baron with all the eagerness of a romantic lover sent a letter flying back, asking her to come back to the Barrens—and to him. When she did not flatly answer no he sailed post-haste for Scotland and summarily brought her back.

When they reached Petrolia on their way home to the Barrens the news of her return went flying broadcast. And Uncle Milt Cobb came in for his usual share of notoriety while spreading the intelligence.

Old Milt and Crab-apple Jones had been mortal enemies for a matter of twenty years, over what in the beginning had amounted to no more than a straw, when the time came that old Crab-apple began slowly to yield to an incurable malady. His family and friends were troubled lest he fail to make his peace with all the world ere he dropped out. At the time of which we write, he had granted amnesty to all belligerents save old Milt. The humiliating memory of the fight at the Hermit Spring oil well, most tenaciously stuck and would not down. Milt, now waxing very old, was hoping for pardon and he conceived it to be a good time and a good way to walk over across the

woods and suddenly apprise Crab-apple of the coming of the "Baroness," news which, he felt quite sure, would mollify his ancient enemy. The whole country would welcome the event when the papers came out, but Milt yearned to be ahead of the local times. It was early morning when the impulse seized him and he set off for the Jones stronghold in high spirits. When at last he emerged into Crab-apple's clearing he was arrested by what appeared to be a vociferous altercation going on between deep bass voices in the apple orchard somewhere beyond the house. This seemed ominous for a peace conference, but, undaunted, he summoned courage and bolted on. When he arrived at the open door, Mrs. Jones answered his loud knock and coldly answered him no; that the noise he heard was not the bulls fighting but came from Elder Wilder and Mr. Jones who were out under an apple tree back of the house wrestling in a salvation argument.

"What 'pears to be the hitch, Mis' Jones?" he concernedly asked, fearing possibly he might be the stumbling block. She seemed pained with his visit and loth to bid him enter.

Contracting her brows gloomily, she answered, "Oh, Jones wants to see works. He won't agree to surrender himself up unless Elder Wilder raises the devil in some way—I do' know what he means by it—before his very eyes. Come in," she continued, growing apparently less fearful of a scene should Crab-apple return and find his enemy.

"Raise the devil! I want to know!" exclaimed old Milt. As she turned away, he walked in after her and took a proffered seat in the corner of the kitchen. "Does Elder Wilder, in order to regenerate Crab, have faith that he kin raise the devil?" he musingly asked.

"His belief is that Jones can't choose his way of redemption. Got to drop all of his old whims; can't dictate his way of receivin' salvation. Jones is so sot in his ways," she regretfully concluded.

"Mebby the Elder'll find some way to raise the devil yit afore it's over," mirth twinkling around his eyes.

For an answer she set the tea-kettle down on the stove, very hard. "I hear 'em comin'."

Voices indicated that they were coming slowly along the

path by the side of the house; and when near the open window, they halted in a heated difference of sentiment.

"Raise the devil so's I may see him or his image, then as soon as I whup old Milt Cobb I'm ready to b'lieve!" Crab wilfully protested. He had passed the open window and was standing near the door.

"Forgive Milt an' I will raise the devil!" bellowed Wilder in voice akin to the roar of Niagara Falls.

"He owes me fer a shuck horse collar he stole twenty years ago; then he pulled my whiskers out fer lookin' on at the fight at Hermit Spring. Got to give his whiskers a twist. 'An eye fer an eye an' a tooth fer a tooth,' means whiskers, too, Elder."

This threat from her still unregenerate spouse raised Mrs. Jones to a state, verging on hysteria. But it takes a woman to meet perplexing emergencies. She remembered the large box filled with feathers which stood behind the door. To this haven of safety she feverishly guided Milt, who, too, was nervously shaking in anticipation of a fight. "Jump in quick 'n' I'll cover ye over with feathers," she hissed, "'n' when Jones gits out agin you k'n sneak off."

None too quick was the action, for barely had the nervous Mrs. Jones, desperately turned to her dishes again, when Crab, followed by the tenacious and sin-dispelling Wilder, entered the room. They took chairs and the war against sins unto death was revived. Elder Wilder had brought the campaign to the kitchen, hoping to enlist Mrs. Jones in his struggle with perversity.

"He would allow the loss of a handful of hair and an old horse collar to consign him to everlastin' fire," lamented Wilder.

"Wall, I'll give in on the Cobb part of it, bein's I might git the worst of it. Then you've only to raise the devil 'n' I'm your meat." Crab had yielded in the letter, but still clung to the spirit.

Wilder rose with a deep, desperate sigh. Something must be done to convince this foolishly perverse old sinner. He was sure that Crab-apple's concession was pure invention to foil him. Necessity and self-defense impelled him. He walked to the stove and opened it. He then took up the fire-shovel, lifted a blazing brand, turned and hurled



it into the box of feathers! A flare of flame flashed over the box. A scream from Mrs. Jones and a form leaped out of the fire and smoke and rushed out doors, leaving a trail of singed feathers, while old Crab, in bewilderment, yelled, "You've raised 'im! I b'lieve ev'rything now from Genesis to Revelations!"

Elder Wilder had parted the vines and stolen a glance through the open window as he passed it at the opportune time to catch a medium which would thwart old Crab-apple's obstinancy.

Excitement was running high around the Jones residence—Mrs. Jones, in her dilemma, ringing the dinner bell, the "work-folks" running in from the field—when Milt gained the edge of the woods, badly "out of breath." He stopped and ventured a look back. Old Crab-apple, bareheaded, was standing in the yard looking in his direction. Old Milt waved a farewell, then started on, saying, "Out of ev'ry calamity comes lastin' good. He'll have to jine the meetin' now or else break his word. In my hurry, I plumb neglected to tell 'em the Baron of the Barrens was married an' comin' home with the Baroness. Tell 'em the next time I'm over." And his racoon smile was never broader as he sank deep into the scrub oaks.

Simplicity marked the home-coming of the Snowdons. Quietly and unattended they arrived at Snowdon Park; then began wedded life, much as though it had been a long and natural routine. Jean desired no attention and no press notices. Her only desire was to dwell humbly all the rest of her days and give her time and resources to welfare work, mercifully remembering those who were afflicted and less fortunate in possession of this world's abundance. This purpose had been settled between her and James before their marriage.

And the beneficent works of the Snowdons multiplied as time glided by. There were the gala days for the laborers of the valley. There was the free hospital and the nurses for the sick. There was the Union Church, the Community House, the kindergarten, the moving picture play-house, the domestic science school for the girls, the trades building for the boys—all dividends from resources were converted, by the Snowdons, into philanthropic works.

Old Milt Cobb often proclaimed it was not written for Jim Snowdon that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." For Milton, waxing old, received multi-fold blessings from James's bountiful hand.

## AFTERMATH

After an epoch of five years it was summer again at Snowdon Park. The elevation of the place rendered it a cool resort in which to pass the warm summer months. So the Snowdons realized and they were back again. To the family had been added the rollicking twins, Jean and Cad, and wee toddling Jamie, learning his first steps.

The evening was beautiful, and Jean had strolled away, unnoticed, leaving the youngsters, the nurse and the dogs in a riotous gambol over the grounds, to meet Jim who, she knew, would be coming down from the farm. Up the path past Big Ben she soon came to the drive which led, at a slight ascent, through the birches. When the open was reached, she paused. Before her, the broad acres of meadow land and waving grain stretched far away to the east. To the right, in the great orchard the boughs hung down, laden with ripening fruit. Farther up the drive to the left, was the dairy house and the great barns—all this in place of the barren waste which James had found, years before, upon his arrival in America.

A soft whistle startled her. It came from the orchard. She turned to see her husband coming toward her with a basket of the first ripe apples of the season.

“What was the work today, Jem?” He was clad in overalls.

“I followed the reapers and binders with the best of them.”

“And supper?”

“I had the best ever at the dairy house.”

She took a shining red apple from the basket as he came up. “Ye’ll no quit wark, gin ye were as rich as Croesus,” looking at him proudly.

“*Laborare est orare*,” he smilingly replied.

“The meaning, for my Latin is always lame, Jem.”

“Labor is worship,” he answered. “Let us sit here and rest,” dropping down on a rustic seat beside the drive.

Seated by his side, she removed his straw hat. "Yeer growin' gray, Jem," she said in tones of sadness.

He pulled her to him and kissed her.

"But A've sillery threads in mee ain locks, Jem," she sweetly added by way of consolation.

"They're honorable gin they crown honorable heids, are locks 'o gree, lassie. We'll nae disdain them."

The glimmering landscape was fading into darkness and the stars were blinking out. An owl hooted from the thick top of a scraggy pine that stood below them where farm and forest met.

Jim smiled. "I found something in that old pine-top one day, Jean. You remember Milt Cobb's favorite character, the Hillside-Mooney, that I've told you about. Milt got hold of a great tin horn, large as a cannon. Then he cunningly attached a great, flaring, conical tin-sheet to the mouth-piece, to catch wind, and hung it with wire in the dense top of that tree. When the wind blew fiercely from the right quarter, the horn was apt to give a blast. No one ever approached the tree, for the heaps of rocks at the base make it difficult to get near it. I was led to it one day by the crows circling and cawing around it."

Jean laughed outright. "What in all this world was the old wag's purpose?"

"That, linked with the story, was to frighten people away from his huckleberry patch just below there on the hillside."

Then was Jean nearly convulsed with laughter. "A legend!" she ejaculated. "And every legend must have a foundation. And when the kiddies are past the bogy age, we will relate to them the legend of the Hillside-Mooney! But what was the man, with fiery hair and whiskers, running through the woods?"

James laughed again. "Old Milt. I came upon him one day at practice in his regalia on the hillside. He was as fleet as the deer."

"And the pumpkin that you shot at through the window?"

"That part remains a mystery even unto this day. Un-

doubtedly it was Milt. He has been a great actor." He grew serious and added:

"The other day I sent him to Hayhows' with a whole hog to pay for that ham. Come, let us wander down the hill, Jean. The dews are falling."

"And some day 'we'll sleep thegither at the foot'," she said with pathos, taking his hand.

"Aye, Jean," he responded, reverently.

"Beside th' ither sleepers we lo'ed sae well," she added tearfully.

"Aye, Jean."

Under the stars they walked on in silence. And the night was holy.

THE END.



JAN 20 1923

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00022240663